

幼馴じみ

三 おごもち

Osanaajimi
Oryou

異世界の
迷宮都市で

治癒魔法使い
やってます

I Work As A Healer In Another World's Labyrinth City vol.3

by Osananajimi

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Translation Group: [Yado Inn](#)

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Chapter 41: Strategy

As summer approaches, the temperature gradually rises. The hospital gets just as few customers as ever, but the atmosphere of the city is different from usual.

From the hospital, the faint sounds of people's voices and musical instruments can be heard. Where are they coming from, you ask? They're coming from the city's main street.

"Master, this is my first festival; I'm really looking forward to it!"

What is it, you ask? That's right, it's a festival. Every year, it seems this labyrinth city holds a festival around the start of summer to pray for safety and a good harvest. And the one this year is grander than usual. As for why... the cause is my earlier city-wide healing magic.

That healing magic. I was worried about how the citizens would take it, but it seems that they're treating it as a miracle from god.

A miracle from god, that saved the city.

I happened to hear that many tourists have flocked to the festival in order to take a look at this land of miracles. The healing magic of this world is deeply tied to religion. I suppose it's something like a pilgrimage. The Krankheit Turtle subjugation led to fewer monsters appearing along the highway, so that apparently prompted a further increase in the number of tourists.

Although, what can I say, it became a huge story. Well, an ordinary person couldn't repeatedly fire off such large-scale healing magic, so perhaps it was only natural for it to turn out like this.

"A festival, huh..."

It hitched a ride on the yearly festival, but that healing magic is currently the talk of the town.

My healing magic is the talk of the town.

I'm getting a little nervous.

...At this point, you could even say that this festival is a celebration of my exploits.

For instance, what if I were to make an announcement right now that I was the one who used that healing magic.

I wonder if a crowd of women all going “I-I was in such pain at that time...! So you were the one who saved me, so dreamy!” would form?

...I’ve been trying to conceal my healing ability, but I’m starting to want to come forward about it. Since I’m the perpetrator of that healing magic, rather than god, they should be giving their thanks to me, in person.

...No, if it came out that there’s a healer capable of healing the entire city, all the hospitals in the city would be in danger of going out of business. There’s the risk that my life would be targeted, and I even told Yuel something along those lines, so I won’t do it.

"Even though there’s still a week left, it’s really bustling this year, isn’t it?"

From what Eris said, it seems the festival itself starts a week from now. But the number of people and carts in the city is steadily increasing. There are quite a few stalls selling things you ordinarily can’t find here, too.

"Lots of money is necessary, right? I’ll work hard!"

Yuel emphatically makes a little Guts pose. Apparently the tavern is busier than ever, and Yuel is in demand for as many part-time shifts as possible. Most likely, Yuel herself wants some spending money that she can use without restraint during the festival. And her wallet must be empty after buying that bracelet. Accordingly, she’ll be working at the tavern today too. I’m planning to idle around the hospital, myself.

Then, when Yuel leaves the hospital to go to her part-time job... for some reason, she immediately returns.

"Master, a letter has arrived."

I take a look, and Yuel is holding a sheet of stationery. It’s addressed to Eris.

"Hahhh, that girl is truly..."

After Yuel leaves, Eris reads the letter and sighs as she rubs her temples.

"Who's the letter from?"

"It's from Aria... my younger sister. It's her usual status update."

Her younger sister, huh? Now that I think about it, I don't really know much about Eris' younger sister. Or more precisely, I didn't even know she had one until just recently.

About all I know is that she went off to the knight academy in order to become a knight. So her name is Aria, huh?

I wonder what was written in the letter. From Eris' reaction, maybe she got held back with bad grades and she needs another year's worth of tuition or something like that. In that case I could say, "Eris, if you want me to pay for your sister's tuition, well... you understand, right?". Not that I would ever do that.

"Huh, let me have a look at it."

"Sure, go ahead."

In a very ordinary mood, I receive the letter from Eris. I receive the letter, but...

"Oi, if you don't let go I can't read it."

Eris doesn't release her hand. She looks at my face, then back at the letter. And then, as if recalling something, she strengthens her grip on the letter.

"...Wait, I-I decided against it!"

Eris hastily takes back the letter and hides it against her chest. What's with that? What did she remember? What might be written in that letter? It's not like I'm all that interested, but from the way she's hiding it, there's something she doesn't want me to see. Maybe the letter actually makes her out to be an outrageous

siscon or something.

—And, as I'm thinking about such things, a huge cheer suddenly erupts from the main street.

"W-What a tremendous cheer... I wonder what they might be doing out there."

Eris tries to misdirect me. Well, but, that was indeed quite a cheer. Just from the sound of those voices I can tell how festive the mood is.

Although the festival itself is in the preparatory stage, there are already numerous carts and people around. It's making me restless. I was planning to idle around the hospital and look for opportunities to sexually harass Eris, but I guess I should quit. Just now, I've started wanting to enjoy this atmosphere a little.

Let's go play.

I almost call out to Yuel — oh right, she just left for her part-time job.

Should I invite Eris? There's no sign of any customers, so she shouldn't mind leaving the hospital empty for a while.

"Eris, shall we go check out the city for a bit? It's not like any customers are coming."

"Nn... err, I'm sorry. I don't really want to leave the hospital empty today."

Eris seems a little indecisive, but she declines my invitation. She's thinking about Yuel not being here due to work and decided to work too, huh? Well, people are flocking to the city for the festival. I suppose there's still the possibility that customers will come in the future. She's so diligent.

Oh well, guess I'll go have some fun on my own today!

I'm on the labyrinth city's main street. The number of tourists has been increasing day by day; there really are a lot of people. I try to determine where that cheer earlier came from, but there are crowds everywhere so it's hard to tell specifically.

It might be a good thing that Yuel didn't come with me, considering her height. If I lost sight of her for a second on this main street, it'd be tough to find her again.

I wander around a little to check things out, and there are a variety of stores. Unusual magic tools that I don't even know the use of; shady-looking stalls

selling matchmaking accessories. There's even target practice using toy-like bows.

"Oh? If it ain't Shiki-san!"

As I tour the main street in that manner, a voice suddenly calls out to me. That throaty voice is unmistakable.

I glance in the direction of the voice, and there are Eight and Geyser, on a thin side street off the side of the road.

...Although, what are they up to?

Geyser's eyes are as big as plates, leering at the main street. He looks like a ruffian keeping watch over the street from a darkened back alley. It's terribly suspicious.

In contrast, Eight is unwittingly tapping his fingers together and fidgeting bashfully. He's so nervous he can't relax. It's totally disgusting.

"Watcha doin'?"

"Can'tcha tell by looking? Picking up chicks. I'm waiting for that girl with the huge tits to pass by."

...This guy, with that repulsive face, says he's gonna pick up girls? Is he sane? I turn to Eight for an explanation.

"Well, seems like Geyser used up all the money he earned from the Huge Slime, so."

I see, since he can't go to an adult establishment anymore, he's looking to nab a girl around here, something like that. But with Geyser's face and personality, I have a feeling picking up girls will be impossible. And that face.

It'll probably end in failure. It'd be more meaningful to just settle for using Slime Jelly.

"Geyser, be a good boy and come earn some money in the labyrinth. I'll hang out with you for a while. Got nothing better to do at the moment."

"Oi oi, don't mock me! I did pretty damn well for myself last year, y'know? Well, she didn't have much time so we ended up only having a light meal

though."

That's gotta be a lie. I can't believe that Geyser succeeded in picking up a chick. I mean, look at that face. I turn to Eight for an explanation.

"...It's not like I saw it either, but... he might've been saying something about that last year."

No way. The spectacle of that Geyser, picking up a girl and amiably flirting over a meal.

...It's a bit hard to swallow.

No, Geyser may be an idiot with a shabby face, but he doesn't lie for no reason. Maybe it's fine to believe him. But man... it's Geyser, y'know?

"Don't believe me, huh? Fer cryin' out loud... first of all, festival time is the easiest chance to land a woman in the whole year."

Geyser zips right up to me. His face sure is repulsive, but the expression on it is serious.

"Got it? Think about it. A ton of chicks are coming here from other cities to see the sights. They don't know their way around the city, right? Whaddaya think the first feeling they're gonna have is?"

"That... it looks fun, or something?"

Geyser snorts through his nose at my answer. Then, gesticulating enthusiastically, he gives me a passionate speech.

"Wrong, that ain't it, Shiki. The ones who just got to this city, when they see these crowds, it's gonna make them feel anxious."

Anxious. Even though it seems like such an enjoyable festival?

"You wanna know why? There's still some time before the festival starts, yeah? Which means, since they got here today, they ain't gonna catch a ride back on the same day. That's why, what they need... is an inn."

I'm floored. Certainly, seeing crowds like this a week before the festival, they'd be anxious about finding an inn that still has rooms. There are a finite

number of inns. And yet, tourists keep coming one after another. And they aren't leaving until the festival is over.

"They'll be anxious. Make no mistake, the first thing a tourist is gonna do when they get to the city is find an inn right away. But y'see, the inns near the city entrances are usually all full... you followin' me?"

"I'm following, I'm following you, Geyser!"

In other words, these girls are worried they won't be able to find an inn, so us guys who are in the know can offer to guide them. And while we're at it, try and seduce them, that's the general idea.

The girls will surely be in a hurry to find an inn. At a time like this, even if you're obviously hitting on them, once you drop the word 'inn', the odds are surely low that they'll ignore you.

Taking another look, Geyser seems to be watching the entrance of a large inn beside the main street. He must be shooting for tourists who've been turned away for a room.

I'm thinking carefully about it. They say there's a fine line between genius and stupidity, but perhaps Geyser might actually be a genius. This could work. This strategy is unmistakably a viable one.

"Oh, that group of three ain't bad. Oi, Eight, Shiki, let's go."

So the target is a group of three. Should I go? Guess I have to. If I'm not there it won't be 3 on 3, so there's nothing I can do about it. There's nothing I can do about it, so I'll go along with them. Sheesh, these fellas sure are a handful.

And, the instant Geyser and I go to approach the trio.

"I-It's hopeless after all, look, I'll definitely get rejected. Shiki, Geyser, w-what will I do if I get rejected? I-I'm alright, you two go by yourselves."

Eight's face reddens as he falteringly spits that out. I thought he was acting weird a while ago; so that's what it was?

But that's no good. If Eight doesn't come, it won't be 3 on 3. If the numbers don't match up in this kind of situation, that alone will be a huge factor leading to failure.

Then, when I'm about to open my mouth to persuade Eight—

"Youuu fuckin' idiot!!!"

Geyser wallops Eight.

A straight right, with his entire body weight behind it. Eight reacts late to the unexpected event and takes the punch square to the face.

In a flash, Geyser lifts Eight up by his collar. Then, pointing at the trio of girls, he asks Eight seriously.

"Eight, can you see 'em? What are those?"

"...W-Women. Big-breasted women who're so beautiful they sweep me off my feet."

"Wrong, those are tits."

There's a fine line between genius and stupidity. Those last words from him just convinced me. This guy is definitely an idiot.

"T-Tits!?"

"Look. Take a good look. Heeey, ain't those incredible? Don'tcha wanna touch 'em?"

Geyser's focus is on one of the trio, a beast girl sporting cow-like horns. Lowering my gaze a bit... yeah, definitely cow down there too. My bad, Geyser. Those are indeed tits.

"I-Incredible... I-I wanna touch, I wanna touch, but..."

Eight leaks out a tone of admiration. But, even after seeing those, he's still hesitating.

Yet he can't hide his true intentions. Geyser slightly softens his tone, and speaks in a soothing voice.

"The only way you're gonna get to touch those is if you successfully seduce her. But y'know, that ain't gonna happen if you sit around here bein' scared."

Then, all of a sudden, Geyser smiles at Eight.

"And besides, the ones here now are tourists who only come to this city

during the festival. Even if you fail, you ain't ever gonna run into 'em again. Eight. As a man, I wanna peel back the curtain for you. No matter what, I wanted you to understand this feeling.

...Sorry for hitting you, it musta hurt, huh?"

After that, Geyser makes an awfully tender expression and holds his hand out to Eight.

A short pause.

The very instant Geyser starts to look dejected, Eight grabs his hand.

"I-I'm the one who should apologize, Geyser. So you were thinking of me that much! I-I was wrong!"

Eight pulls on that hand and stands up. Geyser turns his face away like he's overcome with emotion, and laughs happily.

"S'long as you understand, heheh."

Don't heheh me. This ain't some adolescent drama. And why am I the only one left out? Not that I want anything to do with that exchange, of course.

However, Eight has strengthened his resolve. I cast Heal on him, and we immediately go to call out to the trio — but, we can't find them.

"Aww, we lost sight of those three already, huh. Oh, that girl ain't bad either. But she's alone... alright, Eight, Shiki, pay attention. Lemme show you how it's done."

Looks like those three already ended up going somewhere else. Too bad. Well, nothing we can do about that, guess I'll just watch Geyser work his magic for now.

We take cover and carefully observe Geyser.

Geyser goes out into the main street, and quickly comes back to the side street alongside a catgirl with some charming chesticles. Although Catgirl-chan is a little uneasy, she doesn't seem like she hates it. Looks like the strategy is a success.

After that, Geyser says a few words to Catgirl-chan as they walk along the road. Geyser is chatting with Catgirl-chan with a cheerful smile... but, Catgirl-chan's expression gradually becomes angry.

Ah, that's no good. She probably realized his goal was to hit on her, and hates that. I guess this is the limit for Geyser's face and personality, after all?

—No, but, it doesn't look like she's leaving his side. Seems like she's going to follow him until they get to the inn. In any case, the plan to target girls searching for an inn is highly effective. By some miracle, he might still have a chance. Will he be able to recover? This will be the turning point of the match.

But, the next instant.

Without warning, Geyser puts his hand on the wall to block Catgirl-chan's path.

Perhaps Geyser sensed the hopeless atmosphere. That was the so-called [kabe-don](#)

. He must have switched to the strategy of suddenly getting close to make the girl's heart flutter.

After that, Geyser brings his face right up to Catgirl-chan's and whispers something in her ear. Catgirl-chan turns bright red and her eyes open wide.

Then, Catgirl-chan—

gives Geyser a sharp glare, scratches his face, and kicks him in the groin.

"—Gh!! U-Ugoh..."

...Geyser squats down, cupping his groin. Yeah, it's hopeless after all.

But man, that catgirl is something else. That was quite a sharp kick. She's likely an adventurer or something.

"Y-y-y-y-y-you m-meowlester! Purrvert! I-I'll b-b-b-beat mew to death!!!"

With a bright red face, Catgirl-chan shrieks loudly. When she does, the sound of clanking metal soon draws near.

Ah, this is bad. This can't be happening. In the twinkling of an eye, a group of two knights comes flying in from the main street and Geyser is held down.

The beautiful catgirl is glaring at Geyser with righteous indignation. In the space of a few seconds, Geyser is restrained by the pair of knights. Just what did he whisper to her for things to end up like that?

"S-Shiki, w-w-w-w-what do we do?"

Eight, who watched the whole thing unfold, asks me in a panic.

"Eight, calm down. Keep your cool. Absolutely don't look over there; act like a stranger."

Geyser most likely said a whole lot about *those*

, I'm sure of it. There's a fine line between genius and stupidity. Geyser is definitely an idiot. To an unmanageable degree.

"S-Stoop! Lemme gooo! I ain't done anything yeeet! E-Eighhht! Shikiii! Help meee!"

Geyser is hollering as he kicks and struggles, but I don't pay him any mind. I don't know what kind of sexual harassment he proposed, but I have no intention of becoming an accessory to a sex offender.

But, when they hear Geyser's outcry, a knight rushes over to me.

"Y-You're the one from the Krankheit Turtle subjugation... is that man possibly an acquaintance of yours?"

A male knight. Presumably he was a member of the subjugation unit. I don't remember him, though.

When I'm about to say "Nope, don't know him", my eyes meet Geyser's.

"Shiki! Help meeee!"

That asshole. He looked right at me and called my name.

...Now I can't talk my way out of being involved.

"...W-Wellll, sorry to disturb you, that's my companion... he's not great with words, so... i-it's possible he might've said something weird."

"I see, so that's what you were doing. The thing is, we've received information that a fugitive criminal has slipped away into the crowd. We're letting you off

with a stern warning this time, so please refrain from any suspicious behavior..."

With some gentle persuasion, I manage to convince him that Geyser was just guiding Catgirl-chan and ended up making her angry with his inept speaking skills. No doubt thanks to my squeaky-clean image.

Catgirl-chan seemed to be in a hurry to find an inn too, so she quickly disappeared without explaining the situation to the knights. Saved, somehow. Geyser, I mean, not me.

"Hahhh, I'm very sorry."

Watching as the knights leave, Geyser recovers before I know it and claps me on the shoulder.

"Oh man, you really saved me, Shiki. That was so horrible of her, even though all I did was compliment her!"

"...You need to do some serious reflecting. Wait, what the hell kind of success was that! Didn't you say you did well last year?"

"at's what I don't get, this worked out great for me before."

I figure she'd have to be into some weird things to be swayed by a method like that. I wonder what kind of woman she was?

"She was a really good girl, y'know? Treated me to a meal, and sold me some jars and paintings for lower than market price. The atmosphere was crazy good. Told me we should pick up where we left off next time we meet."

Into weird things? More like into money. Ain't that a swindler? To counter a pick-up line with a scam, the women of this world sure are tenacious. Or maybe I should say scary.

Man, I'm a fool for believing him.

"...Umm..."

And, while I'm reflecting... I notice there's a girl right in front of me.

"Onii-san, you're so cool!"

Saying that, the girl gives me a smile. She looks 16 years old or so? Her glossy blonde hair is tied into a ponytail, and she's giving off a lively atmosphere. A

sporty feeling.

Although, did she just call out to me? When she said cool, was she referring to me?

"Ehehe, so you heard me calling out to you. Err, Shiki-san, was it? Also, those garments... you're a healer, right?"

So it was to me. Don't tell me she was watching the whole time?

"I've become quite interested in you."

With a friendly grin, the blonde ponytail girl tells me that.

"Y-Yeah."

What's with this girl? I'm thrown off for a moment, but after I think about it I reach an understanding.

Sorry, Eight. Sorry, Geyser. This is what you call a difference in charisma.

I can understand it. She happened to see me desperately arguing for the innocence of my dear friend, arrested by the knights for a crime he didn't commit, and she must have fallen for me. The handsome aura I'm exuding must have shot this girl right through the heart.

"Umm, there's somewhere I'd like to go. If you don't mind, won't you come with me?"

Saying that, Ponytail-chan takes my arm. Eight and Geyser stare in wonder at the sudden turn of events. I say a few words to the two of them.

"Sorry you two, let's meet again next time. Well, good luck with the ladies."

Per Ponytail-chan's wishes, we visit the food carts together. Rather than from a single cart, Ponytail-chan buys a little from a variety of carts. A little from each, but it adds up to quite an amount.

"Can you really eat all that?"

"I can eat quite a bit, you know? Besides, I'm not eating by myself."

Ponytail-chan holds a skewer in front of my mouth and grins cheerfully. I see, she's eating with me so there's no problem, huh?

"Oh right, didn't you have somewhere you wanted to go? I'll show you the way."

"Ah, actually I used to live in this city. I know a really great place. I'd like to go there... won't you come with me?"

What's with that, a really great place? Those words are making me awfully excited.

...No, remain calm.

There are two sides to every coin. No matter how you look at it, this is going way too well. There's also the possibility of getting ripped off like in Geyser's case.

"You're not gonna try to sell me any jars or paintings, are you?"

"Jars? Paintings? What are you talking about?"

Ponytail-chan gives me a blank look. It's only intuition, but I feel like her reaction has a different feel to it. This may really be love at first sight after all.

"Ah, more importantly! Shiki-san, are you always doing things like that?"

"Things like what?"

"You know, weren't you doing it earlier? Hitting on women."

Ponytail-chan inquires casually, but I see something serious in the depths of her eyes. It feels like she's trying to confirm something. I'd better not screw up here.

"Nah, that was just an accident. Those two insisted that I come along, so I had no choice. I have no interest whatsoever in picking up women. And besides, I was just observing."

That should pretty much cover it. And "I was just observing", if I put it that way, it isn't a lie.

"Hmmmm, in that case you're just barely safe, I guess."

"Safe?"

"Fufu, nothing at all, please don't worry about it!"

I don't really understand, but she probably hates frivolous men. That means she's an earnest girl. I wonder what kind of great place such an earnest girl might be taking me to? I'm interested. I'm extremely interested.

"B-By the way, this really great place, what kind of place is it?"

"Errrr, it's a nice quiet place? A place where we can relax!"

In other words, a love hotel? W-Wait, aren't you moving a little too fast? N-No, this much might be normal for youngsters these days. Now's the time for me to stay calm and put on a mature air. Don't panic, don't get excited. Let's just keep it cool.

As we travel through the streets, Ponytail-chan links arms with me. Her quite normal-sized breasts, just barely too big to fit in my palms, squish against my elbow.

While I'm preoccupied with that sensation, in just a short time, we arrive at Ponytail-chan's destination.

The great place that Ponytail-chan mentioned. A quiet, restful place. A place not too far from where we were hitting on chicks earlier.

"Right here!"

...I had a bad feeling about this. On the way over, we were taking some awfully familiar streets. I was only thinking about Ponytail-chan's breasts that were hitting my elbow, though, so it took me a while to notice.

This is Eris' hospital.

Now that I think about it, this Ponytail-chan's glossy blonde hair. I'm used to seeing hair that's exactly this color.

"H-Hey, now that I think about it, I never asked for your name..."

"Me? I'm Aria."

Aria. The name of Eris' younger sister is also Aria.

"Y-You used to live in this city, right... d-do you perhaps have an older sister?"

"Yes, she lives here, why?"

Pointing at the hospital, Ponytail-chan — no, Aria — grins and laughs. The

corners of her mouth are turned up, just like a child pulling off a successful prank.

"Onee-chan! I'm home!"

Wasn't this girl supposed to be at the royal knight academy? N-No, forget about that, this situation is bad. If Eris comes out at a time like this—

Eris, since you wouldn't come out with me, I picked up your younger sister in town and brought her back for some fun.

That's no good. For the time being, I just need to get away. And when I try to get away with all my might—

Aria squeezes down on my arm that's linked with hers, then grabs it with her other hand too.

"Shit! Y-You, you tricked me! L-Let go!"

Eris' younger sister — Aria, is gripping my arm like a vice. Before I can even struggle to shake free, I hear the pitter-patter of footsteps coming from within the hospital.

"I didn't particularly deceive youuu... even so, Onee-chan wrote a whole lot about you in her letters, Shiki-san. That's no good, going to pick up women even though you have someone like Onee-chan."



I want to run away. But I can't escape.

I don't know how mad Eris will get, hearing that I landed her younger sister while picking up chicks in town. Even the act of hitting on girls by itself, Eris surely hates that kind of conduct the most. I-I have to break out of this situation somehow, or else...

—But, I'm out of time. The hospital door opens.

"Welcome home; you're earlier than I expected... wait, why are you with her too?"

We met by chance in the city, so we came back together. But, before I have time to say that, Aria responds.

"Ehehe, this guy was out hitting on chicks downtown so I caught him and brought him back!"

I can't help but notice Eris' cheek twitching.

Chapter 42: Younger Sister

Since we're standing around talking, Eris' younger sister—Aria, suggests that we go inside the hospital. Then the three of us take our seats around the table.

"Onee-chan, you haven't had lunch yet, right? I bought these on the way, so let's eat together. Ah, you too Shiki-san, help yourself."

Aria sets out the cuisine that she bought from the food carts on the table.

...I see. While we were on our way here, I thought she was buying an awful lot, but there's no problem if we're eating together with Eris. Right, she didn't actually say that the two of us would be eating them by ourselves.

The food looks delicious. Precisely because the festival is near, there are numerous dishes lined up that I don't normally see.

...But man, this situation.

When she finishes laying out the dishes, Aria rests her elbows on her chin and starts observing my appearance amusedly. Then, Eris makes a deep sigh.

I wonder how Eris will react to the fact that I brought her younger sister home for 'take-out'.

Will she be angry, or shocked? Either way, a decline in my reputation is unavoidable. But it's not like I have no excuse. Like the fact that I was just observing and hadn't actually done it yet myself. And that her sister was the one who called out to me, so I didn't do anything wrong in the first place.

To be honest, I kinda doubt that she'll believe me, though. Based on my habitual behavior.

"Eris, this is, well, look, I can't quite put it into words, there were c-complex circumstances..."

"...It's fine. If you're going downtown to pick up girls, I won't get mad or anything."

But, I'm unexpectedly excused. Innocent. An innocent verdict.

"Eh, you won't? Even though he came all the way here with me."

As for Aria, her eyes widen in total surprise too.

"...At any rate, weren't you the one who called out to Shiki because you thought it would be amusing?"

I thought that Eris would be under the impression that I hit on Aria, but nope. It seems that Eris is familiar with Aria's behavior patterns. That's an older sister for you.

However, after that Eris' gaze falls as she continues speaking.

"Besides, we're not in that kind of relationship."

...I don't think you had to say that though. Look, Eris, why don't you try being a little bit more bashful? More like "D-Don't get me wrong, we're not in that kind of relationship okay!". Wouldn't it be fine to do it that way?

"...Onee-chan, aren't you and Shiki-san going out?"

"We are not."

Then that declaration. Eris' obstinate expression gives off an air of "I don't want to talk about this anymore".

"H-Huh?"

Aria tilts her head at Eris' attitude. Perhaps she didn't expect that reply.

"...Hmmmm, I was totally convinced that you were... was I wrong? But in your letter... h-huhhh?"

Aria grumbles as she twists her head in puzzlement.

...And I'm suddenly very interested in that 'letter' word. My mind recalls Eris' attitude this morning, and the way she refused to let me read the letter.

Don't tell me Eris openly wrote out her innermost thoughts about me in her letter and they were enough to give Aria a misunderstanding? I wonder if it's a thing where her stubborn attitude and her innermost thoughts differ. Now I've gotten kinda interested.

"But Onee-chan, you're living under one roof with a man you don't have that kind of relationship with?So this is what they call cohabitation, huh."

Then Aria, who was twisting her head in puzzlement, suddenly comes to a conclusion and says that.

"...!"

Cohabitation.

Eris, who was looking the other way, trembles with a jolt. Then she looks at Aria's face, silently opening and closing her mouth, unsure what to say. She's obviously flustered.

"T-That's... well..."

Eris isn't saying anything to Aria. Furthermore, every time she looks my way and meets my eyes, she hastily averts her gaze downward. Her bangs are in the way so I can't see her expression, but... she's acting seriously suspicious.

Oh my, what could be the meaning of this?

By some chance, could it be...

Did Eris want to make it look like she hated the sexual harassment, but in truth that was only lip service? I wonder if there could be a development like that. It might be a thing where she says "I hate it, I hate it" while actually liking it. I'm starting to get kinda excited.

"Shiki-san, you're living here too, right?"

This time, Aria directs the question at me.

"As a matter of fact, we always sleep in the same room together. Every night."

On different beds, though; Yuel's the only one I'm sharing a bed with.

"Eh? ...N-No waaaay! I-Is that true!?"

Aria asks me with her eyes fully peeled, but I just nod stoically in response. It's not a lie.

"...Whaaat, so you actually have some experience, Onee-chan! I've always been worried you'd be all lonely by yourself. I'm sooo relieved!"

Aria holds both hands to her mouth and squeals happily. By the way, Eris isn't experienced.

However, Eris panics even more.



"T-That's because I was worried about Yuel-chan, and... w-we're in different

beds! There's really nothing going on!More importantly, aren't you supposed to be helping to guard the city during the festival, as part of your knight academy training? I was in a hurry, so I haven't done a thing to prepare your room yet."

Ahh, a misdirection.

But man, her reaction is funny. So amusing it makes me want to keep poking at her. I wanna try asking Eris, "Hey, hey, why're you living with me when we're not going out?"

...Nah, if I do that then she'll surely say something like "You're right, that's abnormal.", so I won't do it. Eris really follows through when it counts. I mean, she already kicked me out once.

"Nnn, that's true, but I was planning on staying here while I work. Although in the knight brigade, apparently you have to live in the dormitory if you're unmarried so they can call you out at any time... so don't worry about me, Onee-chan. I wish you two happiness, okay?"

"I-I'm telling you, we're not in that kind of relationship...!"

Aria seems to be having fun teasing Eris. And yet, it also kinda seems like she's hoping to set Eris up with me. In other words, is this what they call family approval? Somehow, I feel like the moat around Eris is gradually getting filled.

"Well, I also get the feeling that Shiki-san and Onee-chan don't suit each other, though. But I'll give you the benefit of the doubt."

But then she says too much. Besides, Eris is looking downtrodden, I'm guessing from being teased too much. She's worn out.

Well, we may be living together, but we've only returned to the relationship we had back when when I was a boarder due to the fact that I bought back the hospital. The one thing that's changed is that we no longer have that clearly-defined employment relationship. Assuming we ended up living together due to the course of events, Eris may not have thought about it too deeply.

...Somehow, I'm getting a little worried that thanks to Aria's teasing just now, Eris will start to become conscious of the unwholesome arrangement and move out. Or maybe she'll kick me out once she saves up enough money to pay me

back the price of the hospital. Nah, no way. Probably not. I'd like to believe it's fine.

"...Alright, it's a bit early, but I gotta get over to the knight brigade station soon. Actually, they were telling me to show my face as soon as soon as I got to the city."

Aria, perhaps satisfied from thoroughly teasing Eris about her relationship with me, remarks as she stands up.

"I'll come again soon, Onee-chan! ...Ah, Shiki-san, I don't remember the location of the knight brigade station very well, would you mind taking me there?"

Then, asking me for guidance, Aria takes me by the hand and we leave the hospital.

With her ponytail swaying back and forth, Aria advances through the streets in high spirits.

"Shiki-san, what do you usually do?"

"Helping out with the hospital, entering the labyrinth, that kind of stuff."

Man, even though I'm supposed to be guiding her to the knight brigade station, she's walking ahead of me without asking for directions. Moreover, she's been barraging me with questions the entire time.

"The labyrinth, huh! Onee-chan wrote that your healing ability was incredible in her letters, but you even fight monsters! Wow, you're amazing."

"M-More or less."

I'd win against a Goblin if it's 1v1. It's not a lie.

"What do you use for a weapon?"

"A mace."

"Wow, I was certain you'd use a cane, or magic."

So does that mean she sees me as weak?

...Well, I'd like to use offensive magic, but what I learned from the customers at the hospital previously was completely unusable. Next time, maybe I'll have

someone authoritative teach me.

"Ah, if you're up for it, wanna have a match? Despite how I look I'm the top of my class at the knight academy, so I'm pretty confident."

"T-Top of your class? That's amazing. W-Well... eventually, if there's an opportunity."

I should come up with a good excuse and refuse. Or have Yuel sub for me. I don't know if I would win against a knight cadet, let alone the top of the class.



I have no idea how many students there are at the knight academy, but I'm

guessing that's pretty impressive. They specifically sent her away to a school in the royal capital, so they must have had high expectations for her from the outset.

And, as we travel the main street while discussing such things—

Suddenly, a warm green color faintly glows in the corner of my eye. When I look over, there's a lone woman in the middle of a crowd, treating wounded people. She has sleek black hair, and she's wearing an expensive-looking ornamental habit. She's still in her late teens at the latest. She's quite a beauty. No tits though.

I stop walking to take a look for a little while, and it seems she's performing treatment on citizens free of charge.

"That's a priestess from the Church of Medine."

The Church of Medine. If I remember correctly, Eris taught me before that it's a religion with close ties to this world's healing magic. I have a feeling it's the official religion of this kingdom, too.

"That's quite generous of them, to give out free treatment."

"Isn't it strange? They've always done that at the royal capital. Giving out treatment in front of crowds and soliciting donations like that. I'm guessing it's because the festival is soon and lots of people have gathered here."

"Huh..."

The priestess treats another wounded person. Furthermore, that's High Heal... no, EX Heal. Using a normal healer as the standard, ain't that priestess quite excellent? Although, knowing EX Heal, it must have used up the rest of her mana; she drops to one knee and breathes heavily.

Wait, this is the first time I've seen someone other than me who can use EX Heal. And I heard that even among the eminent members of the church, only a handful of them can use EX Heal. Perhaps that beauty is quite a big shot.

As I'm staring at the beautiful priestess like that, something tugs at the hem of my clothes.

It's Aria. When I take a look to see what's the matter, she's making a sullen

face as if I've done something wrong.

"...Shiki-san, that's no good."

"N-No good?"

Aria gives me an exasperated sigh and shrugs her shoulders in disappointment. Then her expression makes a complete change, tightening up as she looks at me.

"Shiki-san, I've... been thinking for a long time."

Aria gazes right into my eyes and begins to speak.

The mood is serious. What could it be? I wonder if she's gonna preach to me like "Shiki-san, this whole time you've done nothing but look at girls. You're so unfaithful."? If she does I won't be able to deny it, though.

"I've been thinking. About Onee-chan. She never mentions it to me, but losing our mother and father and having to live all by herself, I'm sure it was dreadful for her."

Never mind. So it was about Eris?

Certainly, Eris has had all sorts of troubles lately, like the weight of the debt and having to sell the hospital. But, considering Eris' character, taking on debt for her sister's sake and even having to sell the hospital, she wouldn't tell the person in question no matter what.

I'll stay silent about it too for the time being. It's already been resolved anyway.

"In her letters, too, I sorta got the feeling she was trying too hard to write about cheerful things. I was a bit worried. That's why... wanting to come see her was part of it, but... I'm relieved that she's doing well."

"...I see."

"Onee-chan is stubborn so she takes things seriously, but the way she feels about you, Shiki-san... I don't think she thinks poorly of you. Onee-chan is not the kind of person who would live under the same roof with a man without a good reason."

Aria was originally saying that she wanted me to guide her to the knight brigade station, but perhaps she actually wanted to have a heart-to-heart talk with me.

What sort of person was her older sister living with? And was Eris actually doing things properly with him or not?

I thought that she just found me amusing, but it seems I was mistaken. Then, Aria scratches her cheek awkwardly—

"So, please take good care of Onee-chan, okay? I want her to be happy."

and bashfully tells me that.

After that I escort Aria to the knight brigade and return to the hospital. Then, soon afterwards...

"I'm leaving this place."

...With no preface, Eris announces that with a serious expression.

What in the world does that mean?

I haven't even said "What did you write about in your letters to your sister?" or "Why were you sleeping in the same room as me when we're not going out?" yet. I haven't especially done anything to make her angr... was it that? Was hitting on girls no good after all? No, it might have been due to Aria's teasing.

That's not what you told me, Aria-san. Didn't Eris supposedly not think poorly of me?

"D-Don't tell me it's because of what she teased you about...?"

"...It's not particularly related to what happened earlier. I wouldn't leave the hospital over something like that. It's just, seeing Aria's face, and hearing her talk about staying at the dorm, I thought it was the perfect opportunity."

"The perfect opportunity?"

Is it that she put up with living with me until now, but after being teased by Aria, she reconsidered me from a fresh perspective? She hates the kind of frivolous man who spends his free time picking up chicks downtown, so she's leaving? I mean if I were Eris, I don't think I would live together with a man like

that.

"...When you went off with the knight brigade on that monster subjugation, that's when I decided to do this someday."

She must be referring to that time with the Krankheit Turtle. But I don't see how that's related. How did me going to subjugate a monster turn into Eris leaving the hospital?

"...What does that mean?"

"At that time, I was the only one left behind at the hospital... I've been thinking for a long time. Why was it that I couldn't come along?"

Eris' expression is earnest. Now that I think about it, Eris was worried for me at the time. I feel like she seemed a bit different from the usual Eris, both when we were leaving for the subjugation and when we returned.

"Moreover, after the poison mist spread into the city, I couldn't run the hospital by myself, either... even though you used such incredible healing magic.

...That's why, I want to at least become able to use High Heal, as a full-fledged healer."

Certainly, if she was capable enough to use High Heal, she might have been able to accompany the subjugation unit.

...But being able to use that, forget about 'full-fledged', that's already 'elite'. Maybe it's my fault, but I have a feeling that Eris' perception is skewed.

Eris is by no means the leftovers. In the Krankheit Turtle's case, since you have to treat quite a few people in one way or another, you need to have an average, no, a bit more more than an average amount of mana as a healer.

"That's why I'm going to study at the Church of Medine in the royal capital. Over there, I want to retrain myself from the beginning."

I heard it from Eris soon after I came to this world. That the typical healer apparently trains at a church in the royal capital. It seems you can also do it at

one of the churches in every town, but the royal capital is the place to go to aim higher as a healer.

Eris' purpose is solid. But this can't happen. I'm worried. I have to hold her back.

"I-I understand what you're saying... but, what about the hospital?"

"I'll close it for a while."

This is dangerous. The diligent worker Eris is closing the hospital. She's really serious.

"B-But I'm sure Yuel won't want to be separated from you?"

In one way or another, Yuel is fairly attached to Eris. She'll undoubtedly miss Eris if she's gone.

However, Eris only knits her brows and looks down slightly. Then, she mutters in a tiny voice.

"Even so, I want just to be capable enough that I could have gone along with you at that time. I'm sick of waiting by myself for someone to come back."

...That reminds me, there's something that's been bothering me. At the dinner party at the lord's mansion, Eris was looking at Ruruka with envious eyes. From Eris' perspective, the fact that Ruruka was there served as proof that she went along with the subjugation unit. And in reality, she did go along with the subjugation unit, as a guide. That look, that might have been envy over the fact that Ruruka was deemed capable enough to come along.

Besides, she's had to endure a fair amount of house-sitting on her own.

I have some idea about it. The matter of her parents' accidental demise. I'm certain that one day, she was house-sitting by herself and instead of her parents returning, what came was a letter informing her of their deaths.

And then with this subjugation, I ended up returning to the hospital covered in blood and looking like a tattered old rag. That might've dug up some old wounds in Eris' heart.

I really screwed up. I get the feeling I stepped on a landmine.

Eris is stubborn. This is no good. It doesn't look like I'll be able to persuade her.

"...Assuming you do go to study in the royal capital, about how long will it take?"

"Let's see... err, if I start over from the beginning, up until I learn High Heal, if that's even possible for me... 3 years of meditation at the sacred ground that's supposed to have a high concentration of mana, 1 year for the pilgrimage to the holy land of the Church of Medine, and after that the lectures and volunteer activities for the church... about 5 years at the very least, I suppose."

...I'll persuade her after all. Not 5 years. I thought it'd be around a month, but 5 years is unthinkable. Out of the question.

"That's no good, absolutely unacceptable."

Eris is currently 18 years old. In 5 years she'll be 23. What's going to happen to a girl around that age, who's a buxom blonde and furthermore a beauty, if I trustingly send her away?

If he's got 5 years to work with, without a doubt I'll get cucked by some handsome local priest. I mean, if I were a local priest, I have a feeling I'd fully abuse my authority to make it a done deal.

If it were 1 or 2 months I still could have given in, but 5 years is really too long.

By the time she thinks she'll be back, Eris could've married a handsome, honest priest and became a mother of two. That's how long 5 years is. That is totally not alright.

But how should I approach this? Eris seems to be seriously troubled by her own lack of healing magic ability. No ideas for how to quickly convince Eris are coming to mind. Nothing but a sigh.

"...D-Do you want to go that badly?"

"Isn't it obvious?"

"I-Is... that so..."

Although, how can I persuade Eris? Once she makes up her mind, she probably really will go off for 5 years to study. I need to stay calm and think

carefully.

...Perhaps there's one way to solve it.

Eris' objective is to improve her healing magic. In other words, if I can just raise her healing magic ability, that seems like a likely means to detain her.

In that case, how should I go about raising her healing magic ability?

Let's think about it a little. This world's healing magic involves mana, knowledge, and faith. These 3 elements greatly influence it.

Having a lot of mana enables you to use healing magic many times, and makes it possible to use healing spells like High Heal and EX Heal that consume large quantities of mana. With knowledge you can comprehend the structure of the human body and decrease your mana expenditure by using efficient healing spells. These two are common knowledge in this world, and I have personal experience with them too.

Then there's the last one, piety. According to the doctrines of the Church of Medine, this world's healing magic originates from "the power of faith". And, the more devout a follower you are of the Church of Medine, the more you can draw upon the accumulated faith in god to invoke healing magic. Plus, the more faith you have, the greater the effectiveness of the healing magic. I don't have much belief in the existence of god, but nevertheless my high healing magic ability could be related to the fact that I amassed faith in the new Japanese religion of "I myself".

Of course there are various other elements like affinity and talent, but in general these 3 have the greatest influence on healing magic.

Most likely, the current Eris is lacking in all of them. Her mana capacity is average or not much higher, and she most likely hasn't studied human anatomy in depth.

And I get the feeling that she isn't that devout of a believer in god either. Perhaps because she's been living in poverty, but she's the type to work rather than pray.

I doubt that I can raise her mana capacity. I've heard that it's necessary to spend a long time in a place with thick concentrations of mana in order to raise

it. That's probably the sacred ground that Eris mentioned.

Piety is also off the table. I don't have a shred of piety myself either.

But... how about knowledge? In my case, I could possibly fill in Eris' knowledge. This world has developed some degree of medical treatment, but even so, I came from modern Japan so my knowledge should be much deeper. The more detailed knowledge Eris has about human anatomy, the more she should be able to use healing magic efficiently.

This is it.

"Eris, even if you don't go study, I can improve your healing magic ability. I'll prove it to you without fail. That's why, could you please hold off on going?"

Since I thought it up, let's try it right away. First, some preparations are necessary.

"Master! I just got back!"

As soon as I resolve to do it, Yuel returns.

Chapter 43: Priestess

It's not like I don't understand what made Eris want to improve her healing magic ability.

The fact that she couldn't come along with the Krankheit Turtle subjugation unit. The fact that she couldn't handle the crowd of customers that showed up at the hospital after the invasion of the poison mist.

Certainly, there's been a demand lately for high healing magic proficiency. What's more, the fact that I came back to the hospital immediately afterwards covered in blood made her worry. And on top of that, I ended up showing her that my healing magic could cover the entire city.

...Perhaps it was inevitable that Eris would be distraught.

However, going to study in the royal capital for who knows how many years just because of that is still not alright. I want to hold her back somehow, but to keep her here it's necessary to improve her healing magic ability.

And, as for what I can do in order to improve her proficiency with healing magic...

I can teach Eris the anatomical knowledge that I possess from studying in Japan.

"Alright, Eris, let's begin our lesson on the structure of the human body."

In other words, health and physical education lessons. With great attention to detail, one-on-one physical education lessons.

I wonder how much I should teach her? Just how far should I instruct the blonde, buxom, trim, diligent Eris? Eris, who just earlier was thoroughly teased by Aria and is surely a bit conscious of me now. What manner of health and physical education lessons should I give her in that state? Various ideas come to mind.

"Master, I haven't learned about the structure of the human body. This is

fun!"

Nope, it's impossible.

Before I know it, Yuel sits down across from Eris with a pleasant grin on her face. This isn't one-on-one. Oh yeah, Yuel got back just a moment ago.

I was thinking of using weird methods, but Yuel's voice cools me down a bit. Eris is currently agonizing over her healing magic, that's exactly why she's making a choice that could drastically change her life. Her expression isn't just serious, there's also some sorrow and anxiety mixed in. Such an expression tells me that she's truly worried about her ability with healing magic.

If I get carried away by earthly desires and sexually harass her in this situation, it could end in a lot worse than scorn.

"The structure of the human body. You...? Despite how it seems, I did complete my schooling at a church at one point..."

Besides, Eris is someone who received a proper education at a church. If I don't go about this seriously, I probably won't be able to teach her anything.

"Well, hear me out. I'm sure you're aware of my proficiency with healing magic, right? From now on, I'm going to show you one of the reasons for that."

"Master, I want to hear it too!"

And Yuel is also watching. It can't be helped. I'll have to play the part of the intellectual Master and calmly, sincerely impart my knowledge onto Eris.

"...I'm sorry, I can't understand a thing you're saying."

The result was, it's hopeless.

"Even if you suddenly tell me about cells and what platelets are, I can't picture it at all."

As for what's hopeless, it's the difference in our fundamental knowledge.

"Besides, even if you just tell me that such things exist... precisely what they are and how they heal wounds, if you don't properly explain from the beginning, I won't understand..."

Incidentally, I don't have the necessary knowledge to fill that gap.

"This is just a feeling, but... perhaps you don't understand it very well yourself? I know this from having tutored younger kids at the church in the past, but teaching is difficult if you don't have a firm grasp on the material."

Besides, human anatomy is complicated in the first place, so teaching about it is impossible when I only have a smattering of knowledge myself.

...Unlike me who received an education in Japan, Eris is an inhabitant of another world. I thought I'd teach her a Japanese level of knowledge, but it might be necessary to start the discussion from the beginning, just like following along in a textbook. And yet, I don't have a single bit of reference material. This world doesn't have the things you'd find in a textbook like easily-understood color illustrations or microscopic images.

"Besides, this is completely different from what I was taught at the church... as far as what you said about being able to form a proper image at the time you cast healing magic, I think that it would be really difficult for me."

This is no good.

Now that I've tried it, I understand for the first time. Teaching someone else my knowledge of the human body is beyond my ability. I might've been able to pull something off if I at least had a single Japanese reference book to work with, but there's no way for me to obtain something like that.

Even Yuel, who was having so much fun, is currently nodding off next to Eris, swaying in her chair as if she's on a boat. She occasionally snaps awake and shakes her head forcefully to stimulate her senses. But then after a few seconds, her eyelids fall and her head gives way to the swaying of the waves again. She's probably tuckered out from working at the tavern as well, but most likely she found my lessons too tedious and they put her to sleep.



It's probably just as Eris says. I can't say a word in denial.

"Ah..... b-but, I could somehow understand that you were telling me some amazing things. Look, p-perhaps I'm even able to use High Heal now... High Heal!"

Eris tries to comfort me, and concentrates on invoking High Heal. But, the High Heal she casts merely emits a faint green glow and disperses. Yeah, doesn't look like this method was effective at all.

...To think that teaching people would be such a difficult thing.

But, it can't go on like this.

If Eris ends up going to the royal capital, just whose chest will I turn to from now on in order to heal my heart with a glance? Yuel's? That's even more unacceptable.

In order to prevent Eris from spending who knows how many years training in the royal capital, I need to resolve her worries. Incidentally, while she's still conscious of me from Aria's teasing, I'd like to brilliantly solve Eris' problems and take things to the "So dreamy, take me!" stage.

It's just that this time, I might have erred a little in my approach. But this isn't the only way.

"Eris, this time was a failure, but there are still other methods. I'll definitely raise your healing magic ability, so please wait a bit longer for me before going to the royal capital."

"Well, I don't mind, but... that's..."

It seems like she'll wait for me. Although, she's being somewhat evasive. Is there something she wants to tell me—

"...!"

And, as I'm thinking that, Yuel fervently shakes her head beside Eris. Then she opens her eyes wide and gazes at me intensely in order to concentrate on my words. It seems she hasn't realized that the lesson is over. But then her eyelids slowly fall, and her head droops. She must be really sleepy.

Well, let's leave Yuel be.

The three factors that influence healing magic ability are knowledge, mana,

and piety. Knowledge is impossible, so that leaves mana and piety. In some way or another, if I can lift one of those up for Eris, even she should become able to use advanced healing magic.

The next day, Yuel is again leaving energetically for her part-time job at the tavern.

As for Eris, saying that she was going to go over the details that she couldn't understand from my lessons the previous day, she's secluding herself in the hospital.

And as for me, I'm searching for something in particular among the city stalls by myself.

The city is showing more activity than usual, thanks in large part to the festival. The number of stalls is also much higher, compared to normal. Stalls have even started to pop up along the side streets somewhat removed from the main street.

"Oh, Onii-chan, you interested in that? That's a magic tool that was just recently discovered in the labyrinth..."

Then, ignoring the salesman's explanations, I activate my Appraisal skill at a stall I came across. Keeping an eye out for a few items, Appraisal, Appraisal, Appraisal.

...But, the goods that I'm aiming for don't appear to be among them.

As for what I'm searching for, it's a magic tool that I can use to improve Eris' healing magic.

In this world, there are various magic tools excavated from ruins or discovered in labyrinths. Among them there might even be magical tools capable of raising your mana capacity just by wearing them on your body, or of storing mana like a battery. Magic tools are generally expensive, but at present I can mostly afford them.

The 2,500,000 Zeni reward I received the other day from the knight brigade. In Japanese currency, that's a whopping 25 million yen. That should be enough to buy one or two magic tools and still have change left over.

If knowledge is useless then how about money. I could brute-force it with money.

Although, I've been looking at countless stalls for a while now, but I can't seem to find a suitable magic tool.

"Ah, Shiki! Fancy meeting you in a place like this. Whatcha doing?"

At that time, a voice casually calls out to me from behind. An awfully pleasant, flirtatious, coaxing voice. This voice is Ruruka's.

Immediately afterwards, I feel soft breasts pressing into my arm. These breasts are Ruruka's.

"Looking at the stalls? ...Huh, where's Yuel-chan?"

"Yeah, I'm looking for a magic tool, but I can't seem to find it. Also, Yuel is at the tavern today."

Since they're shorthanded due to the festival, the wages are apparently higher than usual. I have no idea what Yuel intends to buy, but lately she's been working at the tavern pretty much every day.

But for me to run into Ruruka with timing like this. This might be bad.

"Izzat so... I see, I see, Yuel-chan isn't here right now."

An awfully pleasant voice. Ruruka's face is all smiles.

...I can guess why she seems so pleased.

The other day, at the dinner party sponsored by the lord. Ruruka was there when I received the reward. That's right, Ruruka is aware of the fact that my wallet is currently burning a hole in my pocket.

And the fact that as soon as she found me, she pressed her boobs against me.

...For example, if Ruruka were to say "buy this" in the current situation. No, more like "If you buy this, then later..."

I might just end up buying it. Strung along by the momentary pleasant feeling, I might end up buying Ruruka expensive jewels, magic items and whatever else she wants.

Well, assuming she feels somewhat remorseful and I receive appropriate compensation later, then it's alright.

...But right now I'm supposed to be using this money on a magic tool for Eris. Right now, and only now, the timing is bad.

"Oh yeah, what kind of magic tool are you looking for? Want me to help you look for it?"

"Ahh, something to raise mana capacity..."

"Hmmm, so it's like that... oh right, recently a large magic tool shop opened, but I haven't checked it out yet. It's a pretty huge store even for this city so you might be able to find the magic tool you're looking for? Let's go take a look together!"

Saying that, Ruruka inserts my arm between those soft breasts and tugs me along. Inserting it between those breasts and forcefully tugging.

...Let's think about it from the opposite point of view. I only have to endure the temptation.

Ruruka is an adventurer. There was the previous matter with that earring too; she's likely more familiar with magic tools than I am. If I let her guide me, I might be able to find the magic tool I'm looking for sooner.

It's not particularly because the sensation of her breasts hitting my arm feels good and I don't want her to let go or anything. Not because her unprotected breasts feel so soft through a single layer of shirt or anything. I just need to have a strong will and keep my wallet strings tied tight.

With that decided, let's get going!

"Uwah, what is this skewer, it's so delicious! Marbled beef from the royal capital is incredible, it's my first time eating it, but it's melting in my mouth! Thanks for buying it, Shiki! I knew it! You're so cool!"

While I'm feeling the sensation of her breasts melting against my arm, we slip through the currents of people on our way to the magic tool shop.

"Yeah, don't worry about it... woah, you're gonna run into someone. Why

don't you come a little closer?"

"Sheesh, I-I guess it can't be helped!"

I've only been walking along the streets with Ruruka for a short while, but I've already spent thousands of Zeni. What I've obtained are the incredibly soft feeling on my arm, a bunch of forced compliments, and Ruruka's spirited guidance.

Well, the price was expensive, but it was a cheap price to pay for such quality food. A single skewer is cheaper than a single Heal. If I think of it as the cost of being guided to the magic tool shop, it's not high. Well, maybe it's high, but not if you include the sensation of these breasts that keep hitting my arm.

"Ah, take that street over there and go north."

"Gotcha."

With a truly pleased expression, Ruruka stuffs her face with premium skewers. Looking at her, and how she got me to think "I guess it's fine to treat her just a little bit", I can't help but be impressed by Ruruka's high skill.

Although, until I buy a magic tool for Eris' sake, no matter what, I can't buy any luxury decorative goods. Magic tools are fundamentally expensive. I'm pretty sure I have enough, but I can't let it turn into a scenario where I don't have enough money left to buy a magic tool by the time I get to the magic tool shop.

While I'm thinking that, as soon as we leave the main street,

"...We can't get through this way, huh."

We run into a huge crowd that's filling the street. The magic tool shop that Ruruka mentioned is apparently on the north side of town, a little further off. We should be able to head north through here, but there's no way to get through this crowd.

"Hmmm, what should we do?"

Then, taking a look at the crowd, in the middle of it there's a familiar flat-chested, black-haired woman wearing an ornately-decorated habit. I saw her yesterday too; it's that Church of Medine priestess.

"Ah, looks like she's giving out free treatment again, that Church of Medine priestess. She was doing it the day before yesterday too."

It seems Ruruka has seen her as well.

But there's something bothering me a little about that priestess. Maybe it's because she's as flat-chested as Fran? I wonder if it's easier for

those

to draw attention because an AAA-cup woman is rarer than a D-cup woman?

...No, probably because it was the first time I saw a healer capable of using EX Heal.

Though it drained her mana in one shot yesterday, she was even using EX Heal. Among all of the healers that I've seen so far, her ability is no doubt the best. At present she seems to be using High Heal to treat patients with missing limbs. Treating patients with a constant smile using High Heal, enveloping their hands in a gentle handshake, then waving to the surrounding onlookers.

...What's with this spectacle?

It feels so showy, as if she's an idol doing volunteer work. Aria was saying that it's a performance in order to collect donations for the religious organization, so that might just be the way it is. That priestess looks to be around 17 years old, and on top of that, other than her breast size she's rather well-featured.

"But maaaaan, being able to use healing magic to that degree at such a young age. Even though Eris was saying that just to use High Heal, she'd have to train for years."

"Hmmm, but isn't it the same with you, Shiki-san? Being able to use High Heal at that age."

No, I can even use EX Heal. I haven't told Ruruka that though.

But I'm a special case. On top of being able to use a modest healing effect by nature, thanks to the fact that I came here from Earth where there was no mana, I have a unique constitution capable of storing enormous amounts of it.

Well, leaving me aside, there aren't many people in this world capable of using EX Heal. The fact that she can use EX Heal at such a young age, you might

call her a rather special existence even for this world. And there's no way she came here from another world like I did.

...Is there?

The reason that priestess caught my interest. It might not just be over the matter of EX Heal.

Her black hair. That priestess has pure black hair, not very common in this world. There are quite a few with dark gray or brown mixed with black, but genuine black hair is uncommon. By some possibility... such thoughts cross my mind.

—Suddenly, I make eye contact with the priestess as she's waving to the onlookers. For just a moment. It's not like she was looking over this way; her gaze just happened to pass by.

But, I saw them.

Clear blue irises. Not black, but blue.

Never mind. She's not a Japanese person, at least.

...Or rather I should say that if she had come from Japan like me, then yesterday that EX Heal wouldn't have used up all of her mana at once.

Although, in that case she must really be a uniquely gifted person. If I told Eris, she'd probably lose confidence and become even further depressed. I don't know whether her mana capacity is amazing, or her knowledge is incredible, or else if she's drawing on the power of faith in the existence of the god called Medine or whatever from a great number of devout believers.

As I'm pondering while I gaze at the priestess,

"Wow! My hand is moving, it's moving, Okaa-san!"

"Saint-sama, thank you so much, I'll never forget this favor for the rest of my life!"



My eyes fall upon a young girl accompanied by someone who appears to be her mother, giving their thanks and deeply bowing as if prostrating themselves before the priestess. Looks like the young girl was the one who just received treatment.

"Please, do not concern yourselves. Providing succor to such an adorable child brings me great joy as well. Come now, pray lift your heads."

The priestess says to the mother with a smile. Then, unconcerned about dirtying her clothes, she kneels with one knee on the ground and extends her hand in order to get the mother to stand. When the mother sees this, she's deeply moved and starts to cry. With the free treatment just now, she healed a child who was surely too poor to receive medical treatment with High Heal. It's an emotional scene, as if right out of a drama.

"Thank you so much, thank you so much!"

"Onee-chan, thank you!"

The mother and daughter give countless thanks to the priestess as they depart. Cheers and applause ring out from the surrounding onlookers.

"That's great, that's so great, she treated that girl..."

Ruruka too seems a little touched, seeing the exuberant mother and daughter.

"..."

But what was with that scene? Something feels off. I can't say exactly what was strange about it, but something was strange.

Then all of a sudden, I remember a certain experience from Japan. I see, so that's where that sense of incongruity came from...

Slightly uneasy, I observe the state of the onlookers immediately following the priestess' next treatment. I realize that the first people to loudly applaud and cheer are equally spaced among the audience. After the next treatment too, the same people as before applaud and raise a cheer as if they're trying to stir up the place.

...Those. Those are... *shills*.

The source of my sense of incongruity was: déjà vu. That's right, this modus operandi closely resembles that of a new religious movement. In the type of new religious movement where the founder is the object of faith, they use children to create emotional experiences, and shills to profess the founder's greatness using mob psychology, using those as a source of faith. I've seen it myself several times.

Although, if this is simple volunteer work by a religious organization in order to improve their image and solicit donations, like Aria claimed, why would they be using audience plants...

And then I realize.

"Now I get it."

"What do you mean by get it, Shiki? ...Ah, we should get going, it's no use even if we keep watching."

Piety. That's it, piety.

Perhaps that priestess, is gathering faith in herself, just like I did. If I think

about it like that, her conduct finally makes sense.

The excessively showy atmosphere. That service-oriented attitude of waving to the audience while she provides treatment. Despite being a priestess, those ornately decorated garments. She's almost like an idol or something.

And what settles it is the existence of skills and the fact that she can use EX Heal at such a young age.

In that way, by turning herself into a symbol and feigning greatness, she must be gathering faith in herself.

Eris didn't know that, rather than just believing in god, she can improve the effectiveness of her healing magic by accumulating faith in herself. I only realized it since I was a special case, but the fact that you can improve your healing magic ability by gathering faith in yourself shouldn't generally be well-known.

No, since the Church of Medine is also known as the official religion of healing magic, they may have realized it but are deliberately keeping it a secret between the higher-ups. Now that I think about it, Aria also regarded the free treatment as an attempt to solicit donations, so that possibility is high. If everyone and their mother were trying to collect faith in themselves, then the objects of faith would become diluted.

...This could be useful.

If I have Eris do the same kind of thing, and gather belief...

—Nah, that might be hopeless. It's hard to imagine Eris nodding in agreement to it.

Or rather, judging by that priestess' garments and her escorts, she's a higher-up in the church. I mean, she was even called a saint just now. There might not be any problems if a person like that attracts a ton of attention, but if a common healer like Eris attracted that much attention, I have a feeling it could be dangerous. As a blonde beauty with an enticing body, if she acts congenially to everyone like an idol, I have no doubt that she'd be involved in an incident. And Eris has no combat ability, so that wouldn't be good.

I thought it was a revolutionary idea that would elevate Eris' healing magic,

but... I'm gonna have to toss it out. It's not worth going so far as exposing Eris to danger.

"...Hey Shiki, I'm talkin' to you. It'll be hard to pass through here, so let's take a back alley. That'll probably be a shortcut."

"Y-Yeah."

By the time I notice her, Ruruka is pulling my hand. Oh yeah, we were on the way to buy a magic tool. In order to improve Eris' healing magic ability, as expected, finding a magic item to raise her mana capacity and buying it is a pragmatic approach.

"Look, Shiki, this way."

It seems Ruruka intends to give up on getting through here and use a back alley instead. Well, naturally, I also want to refrain from cutting through this crowd. Then, when I'm about to follow Ruruka, at that time.

"A-Ahhhhh!! W-What do you think you're doing!?"

A familiar, loud voice reaches my ears. I look over in the direction of the voice, and in the middle of the crowd there's a girl with a ponytail wearing knight armor, heading this way. The color of that ponytail is quite similar to Eris' blonde hair.

That's... Aria. And, when she sees my hand being grasped by Ruruka, her face becomes blatantly sullen.

"Eh, w-what? That girl, is that someone you know, Shiki?"

Ruruka, perhaps surprised at the sudden event, stares at me with wide eyes. As for Aria, she rapidly closes in on me with some sort of angry face.

Who would've thought I'd run into Aria with timing like this.

...This might be bad.

"Shiki-san, what are you doing!? Who is that person!?"

Aria is angry. Doesn't seem like she came here to deepen her friendship with her older sister's roommate whom she just happened to notice. I wonder what

her purpose is? If it's what I'm imagining, this doesn't bode well.

"Aria, wait, just calm down a bit."

"Aahhh, come on, you're even holding hands! Just answer me, who is that person!? Your mistress!?"

This is an unpleasant development.

"M-Mistreesss!?"

Before I can give Aria an excuse, Ruruka cries out in a hysteric voice.

"M-Me...? Mistress, are you referring to me!?"

Then, trembling all over while pointing at herself, Ruruka looks back and forth between me and Aria with a confused face.

"S-Shiki, what does she mean by mistress!? Hey, Shiki, answer me!"

This can't be happening. Ruruka must have really hated being called my mistress; she's half in tears. Does she hate being seen as fickle in the manner of a mistress, or does she hate the implication that the one I'm serious about is a different woman? I'd really like to know, but I don't have time to think about that right now. I need to give an immediate explanation.

"N-No, that's a misunderstanding..."

"What exactly am I misunderstanding!? Didn't I tell you just yesterday to take good care of Onee-chan!?"



Then Aria becomes even further enraged. Ah, this is bad.

"Now that I think about it, you were hitting on girls yesterday too! So the part about you only being dragged along by your friends against your will was a lie after all!?"

"H-Hitting on girls!? Shiki, you were doing something like that!?"

Aria is steadily getting heated up. This is bad. It doesn't seem like I can get away by saying that I have things to do. I can't dodge the question.

"Since I saw it, I won't overlook this even for Onee-chan's sake! Shiki-san, you'd better properly explain who that person is and what exactly your relationship is with her!"

...W-What do I do!

Chapter 44: Dragon

I need to remain calm in times of crisis. First, let's sort out the situation.

"M-Mi-Mi-Mistress... She called me a mistreesss..."

For starters, it's not like I'm in that kind of relationship with anyone in particular. Eris doesn't seem to think of me as much more than a roommate, and even with Ruruka it's only to the degree of occasionally letting me rub her breasts as compensation for medical treatment. So calling her my mistress is a mistake.

But I probably can't say that to Aria. Aria seems to consider the fact that Eris is living together with a man to mean that I'm more like her lover or fiancé. Even if I tell her that Eris and I don't have that kind of relationship yet, I don't feel like she'll take my word for it. The reason that I'm living at Eris' hospital is due to the fact that I bought it back for her, though.

But how do I explain that to Aria? She's considerably upset, crossing her arms beneath her chest and glaring right at me. If I tell her that Eris and I aren't in that kind of relationship, she'll probably go "So you're just playing around with Onee-chan!? Toying with her!?" and make things unnecessarily complicated.

...Ah, no, maybe it's fine if I just explain normally? Usually there are many things to feel guilty about with my behavior so it slipped my mind, but this time I was only having Ruruka guide me to a magic tool shop.

"Aria, that's a misunderstanding. I'm just looking for a magic tool, but I don't know much about them. As an adventurer, Ruruka knows more than me, and she told me she knows of a good store, so she was guiding me there. Right, Ruruka?"

"M...M-Mist...ress..."

But, the crucial Ruruka is looking down for some reason, grumbling to herself instead of replying. Did being called a mistress shock her that much?

...But I'm counting on her right now so I wish she'd help me solve this

misunderstanding.

"Why are you looking for something like a magic tool...? Ah, but weren't you just holding hands with that person!? I saw it clearly!"

"T-That's, look. I was watching that priestess giving treatment for a while, so Ruruka was just pulling to hurry me up. Besides, the reason I'm looking for a magic tool is..."

"Suspicious... definitely suspicious!"

Without waiting for me to finish answering, Aria interjects. I guess she no longer has any confidence in me. Most likely, the amount of trust I'd earned from Eris' letters was used up between the hitting on girls in town incident and this latest one.

She won't hear me out. Aria is probably the same stubborn type as Eris. This is pointless.

"Even if you say it's suspicious..."

Unless I wait for her to calm down a bit, it doesn't seem like I'll be able to untangle this misunderstanding.

...Although, why am I doing nothing but unraveling misunderstandings? I feel like this has been happening all the time lately. Well, many of those weren't misunderstandings but rather hiding the truth. But anyhow if I have to unravel something, instead of misunderstandings I'd rather it be panty strings.

While I'm running from reality,

"Those people aren't the ones acting suspiciously! Quit playing around and get back to your post!"

Aria gets knocked over the head along with a scolding.

"Y-Yeowch! Who... wait, d-deputy leader!?"

The one who hit Aria is a female knight who appears to be a few years older than her. With a considerably angry face, she's glaring intensely at Aria.

"You're on guard duty right now! Under no circumstances is there anything strange about this situation, do you understand!"

"Ugh... I-I know that, but..."

Aria is being savagely reprimanded by the female knight she called the deputy leader. Somewhat self-consciously, Aria awkwardly averts her eyes from the female knight. The impression I get from listening to their exchange is that Aria was in the middle of work but she slipped away when she noticed me.

...She deserved that scolding.

"Look here, you're going back. This is neither a game nor a simulation. Failure will not be permitted. Why do you think that a student like you was even accepted?"

"...Ah, b-but please wait! I still have a few more things to sa... ah, please don't drag me, w-wait!!"

"Denied. We're really short on hands right now. And there's also the Krankheit Turtle incident investigation, escorting Saint-sama, mediating disputes between travelers. If the priests from the Church of Medine hadn't offered to help with the patrolling, the knight brigade would've fallen apart by now from being stretched so thin. Seriously..."

Then, Aria is dragged off by the female knight and disappears into the crowd. Even Aria can't disobey her boss, apparently.

...Looks like the crisis has been averted. I'm sure it was only postponed, but I'm saved for the time being.

And the instant I think that.

"I'll have you properly explain about that mistress later! Absolutely, no matter what, got iiiiiit!"

Her shout carries over to me from within the crowd.

"Oi, Ruruka. What's the matter? Let's get going.

...Ruruka?"

Well, there was an unforeseen incident, but I can't forget my original purpose. As for as why I'm walking through town with Ruruka, she's guiding me to a

magic tool shop for the sake of leveling up Eris' healing magic.

But Ruruka's been acting strange for a while. She's been looking down the whole time, as if she's thinking about something. She doesn't even respond when I call out to her.

"Hey, we're getting weird looks here thanks to Aria... Ruruka, could you hurry and guide me to the store? Let's get out of here already."

Maybe because I was called a cheater in front of such a huge crowd, but by the time I notice it I've gathered some disapproving stares. For me, this place is a bed of nails at this point.

And as I continue to call out to Ruruka, she finally raises her head in realization.

"...R-Right, guiding, that's what I was doing!"

Ruruka says that and sets off toward the back alley.

...Although, her voice is cracking a bit. I thought she would walk into the alley, but she quickly stops after just a few steps. Then she slowly turns to face me and slightly lowers her head as she inquires.

"...Hey Shiki... that girl earlier, who was she?"

I was expecting that question from her. Frankly, I can't predict how she'll react once I tell her that it was Eris' younger sister. Though I'm not confident about it, I get the feeling that Ruruka is... positively inclined towards me. I wouldn't be surprised if I'm treading onto a landmine.

But she asked, so I have to give her an answer.

"Yeah, that was Aria..."

"Ah, a-actually, wait! That blonde hair... and 'Onee-chan', d-d-don't tell me... n-never mind, it's fine, you don't have to answer! I-I'm not particularly interested or anything!"

What's with that reaction. Although with a reaction like that, quite the contrary, she seems very interested. And somewhat nervous.

"C-C'mon, the magic tool shop! let's get going! It's this way!"

Well, as long as she's guiding me it's fine. Ruruka turns on her heels and hurriedly heads toward the alley. I guess the conversation is over.

With Ruruka leading the way, we traverse the dim alleyways. There's no light banter like from before we ran into Aria, just Ruruka guiding me in complete silence. It's been this way ever since then.

Man, I haven't said anything since it's kinda awkward, but just how much further is Ruruka going to take me? It shouldn't have been that far away, but we've been walking for quite a long time.

Besides, these alleys.

Since the sun doesn't hit between the shade of the buildings, there are still puddles left in the thin alleys from the rain a few days earlier. And because we're flanked by ancient buildings that don't seem like they're being used anymore, I can't get a good view of our surroundings. And in the first place the alleys themselves meander back and forth and aren't maintained very well. Besides, I have a feeling I just heard some strange animal noises.

It's honestly freaky. But the streets are too complicated, so I don't even know the way back anymore.

"Hey Ruruka, for a magic tool shop, wouldn't it usually be on a big street? Are we really going to get there this way?"

"..."

There's no reply.

"No matter how you look at it I don't think there could be a store this way though... wait, is there actually like a hidden famous store there that only adventurers know about?"

"..."

There's no reply. It's as if Ruruka isn't even hearing my voice; she keeps going further and further into the alleys without changing her pace.

"Ruruka?"

Something is definitely strange, so I grab her shoulder to stop her, and Ruruka reacts with a jolt.

"Eh, w-whaat!?"

"Don't 'what' me. I've been calling out to you for a while now and you were completely unresponsive... is this really the right way?"

When I say that, Ruruka starts to look around the area anxiously. She shifts her gaze between my face, our dark path, and then 2 or 3 of the surrounding decrepit buildings. Her face immediately turns pale.

"...Ah... sorry, it's not this way."

"...Thought so. Well whatever, let's hurry back. This alley is gloomy and it's giving me the creeps."

Come to think of it, we haven't even passed by a single person.

Even for an alley like this the houses themselves are numerous, so it wouldn't be odd to come across a person or two. This is kinda freaking me out. If it's not a shortcut, I want to quickly turn back.

However, before Ruruka turns around, she stops moving and double-checks our surroundings.

After that, she stares firmly into my face. With an expression that's mixed with anxiety...

Then she speaks.

"S-Sure. But, Shiki... that's, well. Before that, there's something I have to tell you."

I wonder what. It's just the two of us in this dark alley. Ruruka's anxious expression and her nervous attitude. Plus her reaction to Aria's diatribe earlier has been on my mind. Don't tell me the reason she's been silently walking all the way to a place like this was for the sake of this "something she has to tell me"? To purposefully take me down the wrong street, to a place with no prying eyes?

Just a little, just the tiniest bit, I'm getting my hopes up.

"W-What's the matter, Ruruka. Anytime is fine with me. I'm ready, so c'mon, you can tell me."

When I say that, a bit of anxiety disappears from Ruruka's face. Then, she gathers her resolve and speaks.

"Sorry, I have no idea how to get back..."

"...Seriously?"

"...Yeah."

That's not quite what I was expecting.

Oh yeah. From an objective point of view, she's been spacing out while we were walking. Of course she doesn't know the way back. Of course it's nothing like a confession of love.

I can't believe I got my hopes up.

"Sorry, Shiki. I just kinda zoned out... I can tell that we've entered the old town, but the streets are too windy, so even I have no clue which direction to go to get out."

"This is bad, I don't remember the way back either.... hm, the old town?"

"Yeah, the old town is a place where the housing district was really cramped back when this city was smaller. But because they were so close together and the sun didn't hit them, the houses got moldy. And the sewers weren't maintained so lots of people got sick, and no matter how many healers there were it wasn't enough, so the area was abandoned."

So an entire district was vacated due to health issues? Nah, maybe the mold in this world is so toxic that it immediately affects the human body. Actually, as far as I can tell from looking at the buildings, it does seem like they were abandoned an extremely long time ago. Well, whether or not it's harmful doesn't matter if you have healing magic, so I don't really care either way.

"You're surprisingly well-informed."

"You see, Fran loves things like the city's history, so..."

Now that you mention it, I have the feeling Yuel was having a conversation with her before about the city walls. That girl, despite those blonde drills her choice of topics is refined.

"Well, let's keep walking and pray we come out on the main street. Theoretically we're in the center of the city, so we should hit it sooner or later."

"Right, it's a pain but it's our only option. I'm sorry, I'll guide you properly once we get to a road I'm familiar with."

"Well, you don't have to apologize that much..."

Ruruka getting lost is no doubt because she was deep in thought. And the impetus for that was Aria's tirade.

Being called a mistress, what could be making her think that hard...? Oh yeah, something like that happened back when we entered the labyrinth together too. I'm interested. I'm awfully interested. I wonder if I should strike up a conversation in order to figure it out.

While I'm considering it,

"...Huh, wait, don't you hear some sort of voice coming from over there?"

Ruruka murmurs. Then, cupping her hands to her ears, she starts moving her head around.

"Oh...?"

I try straining my ears as well. Yeah, I can definitely hear something.

"You heard it too, Shiki? Thank goodness, maybe we can ask them for directions!"

The source of the sound doesn't seem to be very far away. Heading towards the voice along with Ruruka, we turn down two alleys. And there it is.

...A monster.

Not a human. In a space that looks like it was forcibly created by crushing a house, there's a huge, lizard-faced monster. A monster covered in chains attached to stakes driven into the ground, with a collar around its neck.

Taking a closer look, this monster has scales covering its entire body that are

brown and orange and every color in-between, and large wings growing out of its back. Its overall size is somewhere around 4m long.

...This thing, ain't it a dragon? I get a feeling this is the monster known as 'Dragon'.

When I try using Appraisal on it, 'Earth Dragon' appears. Yup, it's a dragon. Looks like what we heard wasn't the voice of a human, but the cries of this dragon.

"W-What is a monster like that doing in a place like this..."

Why is there a monster in the middle of the city, not to mention in a deserted area? What the hell are the knights who're supposed to be guarding the city doing? If this dragon came at us, could Ruruka and I win against it? No, would we be able to run away from it?

I have so many questions.

"Wah, wahh, amazing, amazing, Shiki! It's a dragon! This might be my first time seeing one this close up! ...Uwaaa, it's so cuuute."

But it doesn't seem like Ruruka is thinking about any of the same concerns that I am.

Pointing at the dragon, she's innocently delighted. Her eyes are sparkling, she's gazing at the dragon from different directions, talking about how its scales are nice and glossy, and how big and hard its claws are.

H-Huh...? I feel like my senses are messing with me.

"Ah, I might still have some of that royal capital marbled beef left... there it is! Will it eat it...? Wah, Shiki, it ate it, the little guy ate it! Ah, it's nuzzling my hand with its head. C-Cuuuute!"

Then, showing no sign of fear, Ruruka starts to feed it. By grabbing the meat by hand and holding it directly in front of the dragon's mouth. This is crazy dangerous. But, the dragon is carefully eating the meat without taking a bite out of Ruruka's hand, and watching it makes Ruruka's eyes sparkle with glee.

...I wonder why she's not afraid of it biting her even though it's a monster? I'm half-expecting it to suddenly chomp her like that round, black [doggy thing](#)

from a certain plumber game. Just looking at that dragon’s sharp fangs is bringing back my trauma from being bitten by the Giant Ant.

"O-Oi, don’t get so close. It could be dangerous."

"Eh? Ah, y’know, dragons are different from other monsters. They’re highly intelligent and sociable, so they won’t attack you unless you lay a hand on them first. And they can understand human speech; they’re not evil monsters... Shiki, that’s just common sense, you didn’t know that?"

Seeing me drawing back from the dragon, Ruruka clarifies. So that was the source of my disconnect. I had an image of monsters as aggressive creatures that attack humans indiscriminately on sight, but apparently that doesn’t apply to all of them. Now that she mentions it, the wolves we previously encountered in the forest were waiting for us and the Armor Ogre to weaken each other, and the Krankheit Turtle became enraged when its egg was broken. So there are monsters with intelligence too. Depending on their level of intelligence, it’s reasonable for there to be monsters that don’t attack people.

Rather, the way Ruruka puts it, that seems to be common knowledge in this world.

"Ah, nah, even so it might accidentally bite you or something."

"I’m fine. And look, it’s so friendly."

The part about it being sociable doesn’t seem to be a lie. Towards Ruruka who fed it some premium meat, it’s nuzzling her profusely and licking her hand.

Besides, now that I get a good look at that dragon’s collar, from the way it’s decorated I get the feeling that it’s some kind of magic tool. When I try using Appraisal on it,

Magic Tool
Properties: Enslavement - Monster
Conditions: Target Surrender

It appears to be something like the monster version of a slave crest. I haven’t heard much about it, but perhaps there’s something like that too in this world. Target Surrender probably refers to a condition such as having to make it admit defeat before the effect will activate.

Although, the fact that there's something like this attached means it must have an owner somewhere. Well, I figured as much from the collar and chains already.

"Hello, it's wonderful that you appreciate it... though, please refrain from feeding it without permission."

No sooner do I arrive at that conclusion than a man's voice calls out to us from behind. A tall man with deep circles under his eyes. he's wearing a dark hood and there's a whip attached to his hip. Is he the owner of this dragon?

"Eh? Ah, I-I'm sorry. This dragon was just so cute that I unthinkingly...!"

Ruruka also notices and distances herself from the dragon a bit. The hooded man glances at Ruruka before turning his gaze on me. His expression is asking what we're doing in a place like this. By some chance, he may be suspicious that we're dragon thieves or something.

"Sorry to bother you, we got lost and we heard some kind of voice, so we thought there was a person here..."

I start with an explanation. Though the hooded man nods in understanding, he's still eyeing Ruruka and I with suspicion. He's being wary of us. Well, most likely people don't normally come to a place like this.

...I say normally, but there normally aren't dragons in a place like this either.

Or perhaps I should say, who is this guy? Even if dragons are monsters accepted by people, I can't comprehend the reason why there would be one chained down in such a deserted place.

"...Yeah, this dragon is a surprise participant in the martial arts tournament that's going to be held during the festival, so it's being kept here. If word gets around then it'll ruin the excitement, so, well, could you please do your best to keep this a secret?"

Perhaps sensing the suspicion in my look, the hooded man gives us an explanation.

I see, a martial arts tournament huh? I'm betting it's some "Showdown

between the winner and a dragon!"-style exhibition. And I heard that the festival is going to be grander than usual this year, so perhaps there are a number of events planned.

"...The martial arts tournament, huuuh... I doubt I could win against this dragon though..."

"Are you participating too, Ruruka?"

"Nah, I'm not. Fighting solo isn't really my specialty and all."

Now that I think about it, Ruruka has nothing but shield skills. She might not be that great at the kind of swordplay you'd find in a martial arts tournament. Even so, without a doubt she's still stronger than me.

"Besides, the blacksmithing convention, the singing competition, the beauty contest, there are so many events on the day of the festival! Participating in the martial arts tournament would take up the whole day, so that'd be a waste."

There's even a beauty contest? I know what I'm doing on the day of the festival. Let's go see some beautiful women. Let's go have a look at the number one buxom beauty in town.

...Wait.

"Beauty contest, huh... maybe I should try to encourage Eris to join."

If there's really a beauty contest, rather than just watching I might be able to encourage Eris to participate. With her figure, if she enters then I'm sure she can gain worshippers of a sort. And if she earns reverence there, her healing magic ability should increase.

...Ah, but is that hopeless? If she stands out too much and attracts some nasty stalker, things could get ugly. Besides, even if I tell her to participate, I can't possibly see her nodding in agreement.

"Eris-san... entering the beauty contest?"

While I'm thinking about it, Ruruka questions me.

"Ah, no, I was just thinking of encouraging her to join."

"I-I see."

When I reply, Ruruka's head droops slightly. She appears to be thinking about something. What is it, did I set fire to her competitive spirit with something like "if Eris joins then so will I"? No, I wonder if she's just being a little overly self-conscious.

—The hooded man lightly clears his throat.

"Right, you folks were here because you lost your bearings. If you head straight east along the street over there, that's the shortest route onto a major road."

The hooded man is looking at us with a flabbergasted expression. His wariness from when we first met seems to have been cleared up. And I feel like he's implicitly telling us to go away already. Well, in front of someone connected to the martial arts tournament, talking about other events on the same day and calling participation in the martial arts tournament a waste, I guess that's how it would turn out.

"Ah, thank you very much... let's go, Shiki."

"Yeah."

Glancing reluctantly back at the dragon, Ruruka enters the alley the hooded man told us to use. I follow behind her.

"All things considered, that sure was a cute dragon, right Shiki?"

She's looking for my affirmation, but I don't really understand her sensibilities. Or rather, she really likes dragons that much? Maybe she read some tale of adventure with a dragon in it and that's what made her decide to become an adventurer? Actually, what adventurers do in this city is basically just hunt monsters that they can handle, in the labyrinth. There are hardly any legends of epic adventures.

No, maybe that's exactly why she'd yearn for such things.

I think it over while I make small talk with Ruruka as we aim for the main street.

Suddenly, I spy a muscular man coming towards us from the opposite end of the road. He's carrying a mace on his back and seems really robust. When I get

a closer look, he's wearing the garments of a priest from the the Church of Medine. His physique isn't priest-like, but that's unmistakably a priest from the Church of Medine. Maybe he got lost just like we did.

Then, as he's about to pass us by.

I feel like the priest is glaring at me and Ruruka. That look is as if he's sizing us up.

...Something along the lines of "You got a lotta nerve bringing a woman to such a shady alley", I wonder?

Even though he's a priest, he's giving me such a thuggish look. But I've had quite enough trouble for one day. Getting involved in a "Hey bro, nice woman you got there!" incident on such a lightly-traveled road would be more than I can take. I try my best to avoid eye contact as we pass him by.

"...I think it'd be great if Shiki were that well-built."

After we do, Ruruka blurts out something like that.

"No, don't be absurd. Besides, I have no intention of fighting if I can help it. All I need to train are my running legs."

"But at the very least you should really be able to look at a dragon without drawing back."

...I got a good look, Ruruka-san. But dragons are scary after all.

Chapter 45: Ruruka and the Wall

Walking down the road that the dragon's owner told us about, we came out on the main street before long. After that Ruruka guided me to the magic tool shop, and we reached it a few minutes ago. Presently, I'm in the middle of scouring the shop for a particular magic tool.

Looks like it wasn't a lie that Ruruka also wanted to come see this store; she seems to be having fun looking at all the magic tools. After a while she approaches me holding one of them. Did she find what she was after?

"Shiki, look, this magic tool is amazing! Just by putting mana into it, a magic toilet comes out!"

"Magic toilet?"

What the heck is a magic toilet? Doubts spring to my mind in an instant, but when Ruruka infuses it with mana, a simple portable toilet hut like the kind you'd find at a construction site appears.

"The price is... uwaah, 500,000 Zeni? That's pretty high, but Shiki could afford it! It'd be convenient when you're exploring the labyrinth, right? Won't you buy it?"

How can a single toilet go for 500,000 Zeni? No matter how you look at it, it's a normal toilet.

I open the door to take a look and there's a lone Japanese-style toilet enshrined inside the half-

[tatami](#)

space. What about this is a magical toilet exactly? What's next, a

[washlet?](#)

"Ah, maybe the inside of the toilet room is a safe zone with a barrier or something?"

In that case I wouldn't have an issue with the high price anymore; that seems like it'd have a certain amount of utility. But wait, no matter how safe it is, how

would I like being cooped up in a portable toilet all alone with Yuel every time we take a break while exploring the labyrinth? Something tells me I want to avoid that.

"Nah, nothing like that. Ah, Shiki, be very careful where you step, ok? 'Cause if you fall in you'll disappear."

I just heard some precarious words.

"This toilet, whatever drops into it vanishes somewhere else by the power of magic. That's the only effect, but you can't exactly flush with water in the labyrinth so it's amazingly useful!"

"Put it back."

That does sound useful. It certainly does sound useful, yet the thought of spending 500,000 Zeni just for that is unbelievable. However, as if she didn't really intend to get me to buy it, Ruruka reluctantly puts the magic tool back where she found it.

Well, now's not the time for me to be concerned about items like that. The only thing I'm seeking is a magic tool that increases mana capacity. By the way, there's a part of me that also wants to look for one with some sort of X-ray or clairvoyance power. I'm not telling anyone what I'd use it for.

And, as I'm daydreaming while looking at magic tools... I finally find it.

"Even though it would absolutely be better for you to have... huh, whatcha looking at, Shiki?"

As for what I'm looking at, it's the mana-capacity-raising magic tool I've been searching for. More precisely, I'm looking at the the number of zeroes written on the price tag that's attached to the ring-shaped magic tool. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 zeroes. I must have made a mistake while counting.

The amount written on the price tag is... 10,000,000 Zeni. In Japanese currency, that's a hundred million yen.

And I have around 2,500,000 Zeni in my wallet. Even though I received such a huge reward at the lord's manor, it doesn't even cover half the price of this magic tool.

...Isn't this thing a bit overpriced? As far as how expensive that is, I could easily buy several houses with that amount of money. I try looking for a slightly cheaper magic tool with a similar effect, but it seems this 10 million Zeni one that raises your mana capacity is the least expensive.

Yeah, this is too expensive.

"Uwaah, Shiki, you wanted this ring? 10 million Zeni, huh... that's unreasonable, shouldn't you give up on it?"

Yeah, guess I'd better give up on it. No, but if I give up here then I won't be able to resolve Eris' troubles. Besides, outside of buying this magic tool, no other methods come to mind for how to increase the effectiveness of Eris' healing magic without causing any future issues.

I might be screwed.

But man, why is it this expensive? Even though all it does is raise your mana capacity, no matter how you put it, 10 million Zeni is...

...No, maybe it's a simple matter?

For a healer who can only use Heal, this magic tool could enable them to use High Heal. Thinking about it that way, I understand why the price was set like this.

Compared to the market price of around 400 Zeni for treatment with Heal, 50,000 Zeni is suitable for just a single use of High Heal to regenerate tissue. Just being able to use High Heal would be a huge boost to your daily income. And that will continue for the rest of your life. If a healer such as Eris were to obtain this magic tool, her total lifetime income would skyrocket.

It's a straightforward concept. Wanting to improve the efficacy of your healing magic via a magic tool. A great number of people have gone down the same line of thought that I currently am.

"Shiki, you have a lot of mana, so you'll be fine without this kinda thing! M- More importantly, how about something like this one? Look, it's not much, but it's a bracelet that reduces the impact of a lethal blow."

"Ah, no, it's not for me this time, I'm looking for a magic tool to give to Eris..."

"T-To Eris-san...?"

I say it almost by reflex, then I realize. This... isn't something I should be talking about.

Hold on, isn't the bracelet that Ruruka's holding the same magic tool that Yuel and I had earlier? When I take a glance at it, the bracelet slips through Ruruka's fingers. And makes a loud clang.

"...Spending 10 million Zeni on a ring, to give to Eris-san? T-Then that means, you and Eris-san really are..."

Ruruka mutters as her face turns pale. Uh oh.

"O-Oi, Ruruka...?"

"...That mistress thing... so all along, all along it really was like that."

I get the feeling she ended up completely misinterpreting it. After that Ruruka takes a step back, then another. She's chewing her lower lip in vexation, and trembling as she looks in my direction. Her condition is clearly abnormal.

"...!"

Then, when our eyes meet, Ruruka races out of the store to try and run away.

It's a misunderstanding. I'm telling you, it's a misunderstanding.

It's not an engagement ring or anything. I just wanted to clear up Eris' worries about her healing magic. I was about to say that, yet Ruruka is already outside the store.

For now, I can only chase after Ruruka as she runs away.

It might be fine to wait to solve this misunderstanding the next time we meet, but I don't know where Ruruka usually hangs out. If I wait for her to take action, it's highly probable that we'll never meet again after today.

Besides, I get the feeling that she was clearly trying to hide her true feelings with that reaction. Even I can understand that. I can't afford not to chase after her here.

When I leave the store, I spy Ruruka running from the main street towards a narrow alley. Then, just before turning the corner, Ruruka glances back in my

direction. Looks like she's noticed that I'm following her.

But man, chasing after a girl who's running away kinda feels youthful. I mean, on the surface it seems criminal, but this time it's youthful.

Despite those thoughts I continue to chase after Ruruka, and it doesn't take too long for me to catch up with her. I wonder if it's like that? Maybe she actually wanted me to run after her, and secretly ran slowly because she was waiting for me?

...Nah. That can't be it.

"What the heck are you doing?"

"Don't ask."

After a bend in the alley I hit a dead end, and Ruruka is indeed there. However, all that I can see is her lower half, hanging out of a small window in one of the deserted houses along the back alley.

I can imagine what kind of situation led to this.

Ruruka was running away from me, but after the bend in the alley she ran into a dead end. Even in that situation, she was still trying to get away from me somehow. And her eyes fell upon a small window that was left open in a house that looked like it hadn't been used for a long time. She contrived to shake me off by entering the house via that window and escaping through a different exit.

However... Ruruka's lower half is dangling from the window frame. She's flailing her legs; looks like she's struggling to squeeze through. The result is failure; her hips are stuck in the window frame and she's unable to move.

Since the window frame is slightly high up, every time Ruruka exerts her strength to push through, her dangling legs jiggle comically.

"...What, you stuck?"

"Don't say anything."

She was probably in too much of a hurry to get away and misjudged the size of the window frame. Then her hips got tightly wedged in the window frame and rendered her unable to move.

"...Well if you can't move then that's just fine with me. You can hear me out just like that. What Aria said was a misunderstanding. In the first place, I'm not getting engaged or anything to anyone right now, that was Aria jumping to conclusions."

"S-Stop! Don't give me an explanation in this situation! I-I mean, look, if I can't even properly see your face..."

Having said that, all I can see right now is her ass.

Well, perhaps I'm going about things in the wrong order. I should probably extricate Ruruka first.

"Got it, wait a sec."

For starters, I try grabbing her legs and pulling.

"O-Ow, that hurts, Shiki! Don't pull me! ...Right, push! Just a little further and I feel like I can get inside!"

Just now she told me to push. I wonder if that's okay? To push somebody through when they're stuck by their hips, where exactly should you push? Of course, you need to push their hips in the direction perpendicular to the building. In other words, you push on their ass.

"You don't mind that?"

"Eh What would I mind...? Ah...!"

In a flash, I start pushing with both hands. I don't really want to do this, but Ruruka did tell me to push her. So I have to do it.

"Wai, Shiki... ah... s-sto... d-don't! Never mind, don't push me! Let go for now!"

But I only push a little before Ruruka protests and shoves me away with her feet. Such a shame.

Although, what I felt from pushing a little was that beneath that softness there was a muscular springiness... err, not that. It was that her waist was completely stuck in the window frame. Neither pushing nor pulling will work. I might be able to pull her out with a few more people putting their backs into it, but even in that case Ruruka would likely give up from the pain before we get

her free. I feel like my only option is to do something about the window frame.

"Oh well, guess it's impossible for me. Gimme a sec, I'll call some more people over."

And maybe I need to bring back some sort of tools too, I'm at the limit of what I can do by myself. With that in mind, as I'm about to step away,

"W-Wait, wait, Shiki! I'm begging you, don't leave me alone in alley like this when I can't move at all! ...W-What if a man happens to pass by when I'm by myself and d-does whatever he wants to me...!"

I hear Ruruka desperately call out to keep me from going. That serious atmosphere from when she ran away from the magic tool shop, I wonder where it went? All I can see now is a talking butt.

"I guess pulling is... no, but... oh yeah, my clothes! Try pulling on my clothes!"

I want to get Ruruka out somehow, but she doesn't like me touching her ass. I guess that means she thinks pulling on her clothes is less objectionable than pushing on her butt.

"If you insist."

Although, even if she tells me to pull her clothes, which part should I pull on? Nah, there's only one choice. Her upper body is on the other side of the wall, and she's only wearing shorts on her lower body. Those must be what she meant for me to pull on. I lay my hands on the shorts that Ruruka is wearing.

"D-Don't touch me any more than you have to, okay?"

I thought I'd grab her shorts around her hips and pull from there, but I get a warning from Ruruka right before I do.

"Got it."

Since there's no other option, I grab the pockets of her shorts and pull forcibly.

...Ah, this is no good.

Ruruka's shorts are going to come off before I can pull her out of the window frame. Or rather they've already slipped off halfway, most unbecomingly. I'd

keep pulling like this, but I can't just strip Ruruka down to her panties.

...Can I?

"W-Wait, Shiki! They're coming off, they're coming off!"

Ruruka must've felt her clothes coming off too; she's flailing her legs violently. I can't bear being kicked again. I'll back off temporarily.

"You're the one who told me to pull on your clothes..."

Man, it sure is going to be difficult to pull Ruruka out at this rate. Ah, that's right. If she hates being touched directly, I bet I could wrap a bunch of towels or something around her waist and pull her out that way. I've got enough towels in my item box.

And, while I'm considering that—

Ruruka keeps swinging her legs at the wrong place, trying to kick me. From the momentum she's putting into it, her shorts slip the rest of the way off and fall straight down.

Then, with a flop, the shorts hit the ground.

The frantic movement of Ruruka's legs comes to a sudden halt.



"..."

Then there's a moment of silence.

Since I can't see her face and she's not making any noise, I don't know what kind of expression Ruruka is making right now. I wonder if she's angry? In a situation like this, should I avert my eyes, or gently put her shorts back on? I wonder which one would be better?

...Meanwhile, Ruruka's legs begin to tremble,

"U-Ueeeh... h-how could, how could this..."

and she starts to cry.

"W-wait, don't cry! Just be patient for a bit! I'll get you out right away!"

Crying is unfair. She looks really pathetic now. It feels like a waste, but I quickly take a towel from my item box and wrap it around Ruruka's waist. After that, I try pulling with all my strength.

"O-Ouch! Shiki, that hurts, it hurts!"

Yet she's still completely stuck and there's no sign of her coming free. But if I don't get Ruruka out as fast as possible, our relationship is no doubt going to get more awkward than ever.

Isn't there something, anything I can do to resolve this situation...?

There is. That something is right here in my item box.

I temporarily remove my hands from Ruruka and take

that

out. Then I use the warm water magic tool to melt

that

to just the right consistency. What I've just created is: slime lotion. By '*that*', I was of course referring to Slime Jelly.

With the lotion completed, I dribble it onto the entire window frame around Ruruka's hips.

"Eh, Shiki, w-what are you doing!? Why does it feel so slimy! What are you planning to do to me while I can't move!? Shiki!? Please answer me, Shiki!"

Ruruka is yelling at the sudden sensation, but she'll understand once I show her how effective this is. I believe in the Slime Jelly.

Once Ruruka's hips get real intimate with the Slime Jelly, I pull on her with all my might. At which point—

—With an audible pop, Ruruka easily slides out of the window frame.

"All right! You're out!"

On the verge of tears, Ruruka sits down on the ground with a dazed expression as if simply because she can't understand what just happened. After a bit of time passes, she checks her own appearance.

"I'm glad I could get you out. Seriously, you should be grateful for my quick thinking."

Ruruka looks at her clothes that have become sticky with slime lotion, and her shorts crumpled on the ground.

"Yeah, thanks... but, I could use an explanation..."

After Ruruka says that, her face makes a terribly complicated expression like she doesn't know whether to be pleased or angry.

...Even though this time I only did what Ruruka told me to do, I wonder if the fact that she didn't timidly thank me is due to my usual behavior or the Slime Jelly?

After that, Ruruka stands up. Looks like she put her shorts back on underneath the towel while I wasn't looking.

"Uwaah, I'm all sticky..."

"It couldn't be helped, there was no other way."

"I know that, I know that, but... wait a minute, what was that slimy stuff? Why did you have it with you?"

Ruruka questions me.

"Yeah, I-look, I'm not very strong so I can't fight that well, right? When I'm running from monsters I scatter that on the ground to buy some time."

That's not the only reason, but I'm not telling a lie.

"Huh, seems useful. I often have to run when I get surrounded, so tell me where I can buy it."

"L-Let's talk about that next time. M-More importantly, let's go back to that store from before, there might be a good magic tool."

While we discuss, we retrace our steps together. I wasn't sure how things would end up when Ruruka ran away from that magic item shop, but I cleared up her misunderstanding somehow. Incidentally, there's a part of me that wants to probe deeper into the reason she ran, but Ruruka seems a bit unstable today. And her misapprehension is resolved, so let's ask her about it again some other day. While I'm thinking it over as we walk,

"That talk about Eris-san earlier... that you're not getting married, is it true?"

Suddenly, in a weak voice that I almost fail to hear, Ruruka asks me something like that.

"It's true. But why..."

"I see."

As we're walking, Ruruka tugs on my sleeve as if she wants to say something. When I turn my head to take a look, Ruruka is hanging her head down low.

"I... can't go back out onto the main street until I change my clothes."

What she's saying is quite natural. Certainly, there's no way a girl can go out onto the main street all sticky with Slime Jelly. But this is a problematic proposal. What might the problem be? It's the building we're standing in front of.

The location where Ruruka stopped me by pulling on my clothes.

...Right in front of my eyes, there's an inn that provides baths.

That is to say, inns with baths are often used for that sort of thing. If you enter as a couple, there's only one thing one thing you're going to do there.

"T-that's right, huh. You're all sticky, huh. You want to change clothes, huh."

"...Yeah, and I can't go out onto the main street like this."

I wonder what her goal is? No, there's no need to think about it, it's gotta be that.

But is it okay? I feel like we're moving a little too fast. Besides, I still don't know why Ruruka is treating me favorably, and I haven't asked her the essential details.

I wonder if I'm making a mistake? Should I let it happen? Yuel won't find out, will she?

While I'm still ascertaining the present situation, I notice Ruruka's ears turning slightly red. I can't see her expression with her head bowed, but I feel like her body is trembling a little.

...This isn't the time for me to waver. She's surely inviting me. It's decision time. And that very instant—

"Ah, we're already full. Sorry, please find another inn... well, I'm not sure if any other inns are available what with the festival going on, though."

—The clerk happens to come out of the inn, and mentions that to us.

...

Oh yeah, that's right. I completely forgot. As a consequence of the festival, the inns are mostly full now.

When I look over at Ruruka, she's also looking directly back at me. Her eyes are wide open, and her pupils are clearly darting around wildly. Did the situation finally sink in? She blushes deeper and deeper red. Her face was already slightly reddened, but now it's practically the color of an apple.

...This is embarrassing.

"...T-T-T-That's not it... I r-r-really just wanted to change my clothes. T-That's all!!!"

Then Ruruka runs off somewhere again, screaming. Twice as fast as when she ran away from the magic item shop earlier. No doubt about it, she's sprinting at top speed. That's an adventurer for you, I won't be able to catch up to that.

"Ah, my apologies, did I say something bad?"

The clerk says with a grin. You did. You totally did.

"..."

I stare dumbfounded at the end of the alley where Ruruka ran off.

What am I gonna do about this?

How the hell should I act with her the next time we meet?

Chapter 46: Magic

In the end, unable to buy a magic tool in order to improve Eris' healing magic ability, it was time for me to return.

"Hahhh, why'd it have to be 10 million Zeni..."

I tried visiting the magic tool shop one more time after that, but among the magic tools that could raise her mana capacity, that one was the cheapest. Even checking out other nearby stores, it was much the same story.

Seems like that sort of item is considerably pricey. It's probably the type of magic tool that can't be artificially reproduced. There's no way to obtain it other than picking it up by chance from the labyrinth. The supply and demand are fatally out of balance.

...I kinda feel like I've exhausted all the means at my disposal.

"Honestly, what do I dooo."

Besides, there's also the matter of Ruruka. It's a secondary problem compared to the fact that Eris might end up going to train in the royal capital, but I should still do something about this one as well. Yeah, the way we parted was too awkward. I want to patch things up somehow.

Well, even if I tell myself to follow up, I still don't know what I should do about it. If it's Yuel I can generally manage it by petting her head, but I doubt that'll work in Ruruka's case.

Or perhaps I should say, no matter how much I think about it, I can't figure out why Ruruka was acting like that in the first place. From the course of events, it seems natural to conclude that she's irritated by the existence of Eris, but honestly speaking I feel like she doesn't have any reason to think that highly of me. Touching her ass, slipping off her shorts... I can think of several reasons just from today alone for her to dislike me.

But still, seeing Ruruka's behavior in front of that inn, there's no way that was really "I just wanted to change my clothes".

In other words, even deducting today's minus points from her goodwill,

Ruruka must've been quite fond of me already. But I can't fathom why.

"...Is it because I'm so handsome?"

If that's the case, everything makes sense. And Yuel said I was, too. Also my grandma used to tell me the same thing when I was a kid.

As I'm reflecting while I walk,

"Marbled royal capital beef... say, Sera, why don't we have some?"

"Fran, your allowance has been completely cut off since then, and in addition you were told to refrain from entering the labyrinth as well, or have you forgotten? You mustn't waste money."

"B-But... I know, let's split one!"

"...Even if you don't eat it here, if you buttered up Lord-sama for some marbled royal capital beef I'm sure he would buy you an entire cow."

"I hate doing that. And that would be pointless anyway. I'm hungry now."

I spot a natural blonde twin-drills and a blue-haired girl, about to get a meal at a food cart. It's Fran and Sera. I guess 'since then' is probably referring to what happened after the lord's sponsored dinner party. It seems as though the blue-haired girl, Sera, is about to buy a skewer of marbled royal capital beef.

...Well, I only noticed them, it's not like our eyes met. I'm not good with Fran. If I try to strike up a conversation and inadvertently sexually harass her, she's liable to fire off attack magic at me.

Plus she's flat.

I consider asking them for Ruruka's whereabouts, but I usually run into Ruruka pretty often, so our spheres of activity probably overlap. Even if I don't ask them, I should be able to meet her again before too long.

I'll ignore them... but as I'm about to take my leave,

"Why hello there. Are you alone today?"

With a cheerful smile, Sera calls out. Handing the skewer she just bought over to Fran, she moves to stand in my way. It seems I've been spotted.



"Q-Quite."

I wonder what she wants from me? They aren't as big as Eris', but Sera is well-endowed. I've got nothing against talking per se, it's just that the drills-hothead over there is scary.

"How fortunate. The two of us were about to go sightseeing in town. If you don't mind, how would you like to share a meal with us?"

"H-Hold on, Sera! I-I'm against it!"

But, Fran immediately barges in with a rough voice. And begins to quarrel with Sera in said rough tone.

"Come now, Fran, isn't this the perfect opportunity?"

"The perfect opportunity... wait. Sera, are you seriously talking about that!?"

"Of course I'm serious. Fran, do you mean to say that there's no need to return a favor you've received? Or else do you mean that in return for saving your life, Lord-sama paid him some money and therefore it's fine to say "that's the end of that"?"

"Gh...!"

"Just because the other party is a man, this is not something you can just gloss over. As a daughter of the Meirhartz family, you cannot run away from it."

For a moment I wonder what they're talking about, but somehow or other I have an idea. Looks like Sera wants to make Fran thank me. As for why, it's probably over the matter of me saving her from that Krankheit Turtle's charge.

I received a reward from the lord, but Sera appears to be dissatisfied with that alone. Although something tells me she's just using it as an excuse to work on Fran's misandry.

"...Fine, I understand."

And, Fran reluctantly gives in to Sera's persuasion. The phrase "as a daughter of the Meirhartz family" seems to have been the clincher.

When Fran nods, Sera turns her attention to me next.

"There you have it, Shiki-san. If there's anything at all you'd like Fran to do for you, please don't hesitate to ask."

""A-Anything at all!?"

My surprised outcry overlaps with Fran's. She did just say *anything*, right?

"W-What are you thinking, Sera! I'm a daughter of Meirhartz, aren't I!? Are you telling me to offer up my virginity to this nobody of a man!?"

I haven't said a single word yet about anything like taking her virginity. In Fran's mind, am I some beast with nothing but sexual desire in my head or something?

...Well, I can't deny that though.

Certainly, it might have crossed my mind for a moment, but I have no intention of actually saying it. And Sera wouldn't actually listen to it if I did.

"Fran, what favor did this daughter of Meirhartz receive? ...The gift of life. Shiki-san went so far as to risk his own life to save you, so shouldn't you at least have the resolve to accept whatever unreasonable demand he imposes on you?"

She would listen to it. It bothers me a bit that she's assuming I'll demand something outrageous, though.

...Although, these guys are Ruruka's party members. If it ends up like "I had your ally give me her virginity as thanks for saving her life", Ruruka will no doubt despise me from the bottom of her heart. I can't demand something like that in the first place. Plus I have no interest in flat chests, either.

"B-But, even for a life debt, saying "anything at all" ...!"

"Fran, when it looked like you were going to fall into the river, at that time I regretted not putting my foot down more firmly with you. You can only become the next lord if you're still alive. If you hate such things, then don't incur any life debts anymore."

Sera addresses Fran with even greater fervor. She's sounding like a preacher.

Somehow this is giving me the impression that I can't really make an unreasonable demand, and that I'm just being used as a pretext for Fran's

education. I mean, that's most likely how it is.

When her sermon to Fran is over, Sera gives me a small wink so that only I can see it. As I thought, it means I can't really ask for anything at all; this is a kind of lesson.

"Very well, Shiki-san. Please say whatever it is you'd like Fran to do for you."

For starters, I look Fran's body up and down as if I'm tasting it with my eyes. That alone makes Fran clasp her hands over her body in an attempt to hide it while glaring at me. Is she that anxious about it? Her eyes are getting watery.

...I think she should just reject it if she hates it that much, but perhaps because of that "daughter of the lord" title she's being excessively dutiful.

Though, what do I ask of her? I don't especially feel like there's anything I want from her...

Wait, there is something.

"Oh right, tell me where Ruruka is currently staying."

I want to follow up with Ruruka over today's incident, but I don't know which inn she's staying at. Her party members should know.

".....That's it?"

Fran's eyes widen at my request. She must have been sure my request would involve her chastity, but she's thinking too highly of herself. I have no more interest in a flat body than the average person.

"Yep, that's it."

When I return it right back to her, Fran closes her eyes in contemplation. Perhaps she's wondering if there's some sort of catch.

"...Why are you asking about such a thing? Besides, now that you mention it, Ruruka said she was going to meet you this morning. She said she wanted to go sightseeing together with you in town. You still haven't met up yet?"

No, we already met. Hold on, Ruruka was saying something like that? Even though she was acting like she ran into me in town by chance, was it not entirely a coincidence after all?

"W-Well, nothing to worry about there. If you know, tell me."

"...Did you do something to Ruruka? Even if you're my savior, I won't forgive you if you did something indecent to Ruruka. It hasn't even been four months since I met her, but she's still my precious comrade."

Even if I tell her that I thought Ruruka invited me to do indecent things but then she ran away and it got awkward, I doubt she'll be able to trust me. She seems to be wary of me. Well, if it were me I would absolutely never give out a female acquaintance's address to a serial sexual harasser, to be fair.

Wait, Ruruka hasn't even known these two for 4 months? Ain't that about as long as she's known me?

"I thought you'd known each other for a longer time. I'm a little surprised."

"Four months ago, Ruruka was surrounded by monsters in the labyrinth, and we happened to save her. We were beginning adventurers at the time and we were experiencing difficulties even on the lower floors, so we desired an ally."

That reminds me, this girl became an adventurer because she screwed up a marriage interview and got kicked out of the house. Her getting to know Ruruka, an adventurer, couldn't have happened that long ago. It was probably a matter of course for Fran and Sera, who can't do much besides attack with magic and a bow, to form a party with Ruruka, who specializes in protection with a shield.

"...Well, if you don't want to tell me where Ruruka is, that's fine. I'm sure we'll meet again soon anyhow."

There's no need for me go out of my way to ask for her whereabouts. So long as she's commuting back and forth between the tavern I bet I'll run into her sooner or later.

When I respond like that, Fran calls out to Sera next.

"Well then, let's leave it at that. Sera, isn't it about time we return? I've finished my marbled royal capital beef."

"Fran... you ultimately haven't done anything for Shiki-san."

Sera hands me a marbled royal capital beef skewer that she bought while I

wasn't paying attention, and speaks out in an astonished tone. Now that I think about it, she's right. Even though this was supposed to be about me asking whatever I want of her as thanks, in the end I've neither heard about Ruruka's inn nor done anything erotic. I did receive a skewer from Sera just now, but that's it.

"Gh..."

Taken aback by Sera's words, Fran once again covers her body and glares at me. Is this abnormal wariness due to her man-hating or because it's me?

This is getting a little tiresome.

"Okay, do you know of a magic tool that has the effect of raising your mana capacity? Buy it for me."

"...That's quite an unreasonable demand out of nowhere. I myself have wanted one for a long time, but I could never buy such a thing on my own. Perhaps Father would buy it for you if you asked him in earnest, but in that case you'd end up having to marry me for real this time.

...I detest the idea."

"Of course."

I'll pass on getting married to Fran too. But man, he may actually buy me a 10 million Zeni magic tool if I implore him? That's incredible. I guess that's the lord of a labyrinth city for you. If Fran had big tits and a ladylike personality I might consider it.

"Oh my, is it no good? Fran can get married to the man who bet his life to defend her from a monster, and in addition, Shiki-san can obtain the magic tool he desires. I think it's quite an ingenious idea."

"L-Like I said, t-that's out of the question!"

Sera interrupts from the sideline, but Fran immediately shuts her down.

"Though you would be taking your wife's name, as a noble it is common to have mistresses and illegitimate children, so I expected Shiki-san to find it highly agreeable..."

What's with that detail. In this world, monogamy is standard for the masses, but apparently that's not always the case for nobles. I've always been considering building a harem somehow since it's another world and all, but I get the feeling the goal is finally in sight.

...Well, be that as it may, I can't possibly see myself getting married to Fran. My interest is slightly piqued though.

Whether or not Sera is aware of my feelings, she continues the discussion.

"And Fran, Shiki-san has been recognized by Lord-sama... moreover, the fact that you didn't try very hard to correct Lord-sama's earlier misunderstanding, that proves that even if just slightly, you wouldn't have minded allowing the misunderstanding to carry on like that and become the truth."

"~~~~~!"

The moment that Sera says that, a ball of fire abruptly materializes above Fran's palm.

Chantless magic invocation. The fireball is quite irregularly-shaped, and its size is rather small. It looks so unstable that it might disperse at any second, but Fran is glaring harshly and brandishing it at me.

"O-Oi oi oi, wait a minute! W-What are you planning to do!?"

—The story I previously heard from Ruruka springs to mind. How Fran fired off attack magic into her marriage interview partner's crotch and was expelled from her house.

...Don't tell me this is the same feeling she was giving off back then? This girl hasn't grown one bit, has she!

"Fraaan!?"

Sera cries out at once, but Fran doesn't stop. Even if I try to avoid it, I was completely taken by surprise and it doesn't seem like I'll dodge it in time.

Is this the same roast loin course that the noble was treated to at his marriage interview with Fran? A fireball of this size shouldn't be fatal, but at this rate my heart will give out. Yeah, maybe it's better not to get involved with this girl after all.

—I lock eyes with Fran, who looks like she could throw the fireball at any moment.

Her face is bright red, perhaps out of shame, and her eyes are watery too. Is she that mortified by what Sera told her? But throwing a fireball just because she's embarrassed is intolerable.

"..."

Then— just before she's about to throw the fireball. At the very last moment, Fran flings it onto the ground. Breathing roughly, she stares at the black scorch mark that she created on the ground.

"T-That was friggin' dangerous...! W-What the hell has gotten into you!"

...Somehow I get the feeling I've realized one of the reasons why Sera was trying to hook me up with Fran. First, there likely isn't anyone who would accept such an aggressive woman. Second, if I'm attacked it won't become that big of a deal since I can use healing magic. Sera mentioned that the lord approves of me and I'm her savior and all, but something tells me the first two are the real reasons. I take a look at Sera, and she's just holding her head like "she's done it again".

And yet, with zero remorse, Fran makes a sort of refreshed face and opens her mouth.

"You... are a healer, yes?"

"Y-Yeah."

Even though her tone is normal, I can feel an air of intimidation. No doubt due to that scorch mark on the ground.

"You cannot use offensive magic, yes?"

"T-That's right."

I've previously learned a little about attack magic from customers at the hospital before, but I wasn't able to use it at all. I don't really understand why, though.

"Indeed. Very well, I've decided how to repay you. From now on, I shall teach you offensive magic... I trust you have no issue with that, yes?"

She probably wants to put a stop to all talks of marriage right here and now.
From her intensity I can tell that I have no say in the matter.

Chapter 47: Eris' Healing Magic

"Well, it's not something to be so concerned about. You are able to treat scars via healing magic, yes? If you can use it to that degree, it won't be terribly long before you can use offensive magic. Since I'm the one teaching, perhaps you'll even be able to use it before the day is through."

Attack magic. I've learned about it previously from customers at the hospital as thanks for treating them, but I was completely unable to use it. And yet, the fundamentals of attack magic and healing magic are the same. Manipulating mana and invoking spells with it. That's all there is to the fundamentals.

But, there are two key points in which attack magic differs from healing magic. The first one is that your piety and knowledge of the human body have no influence on its effectiveness. And the second is that it requires extraordinarily precise mana manipulation compared to healing magic.

Unlike healing magic which gets an assist from the power of faith, there's nothing like that for attack magic. You have to reproduce natural phenomena like flames and lightning simply by manipulating your own mana.

I don't know the fine details, but by empowering your voice with mana and doing a chant, it becomes easy to assert a certain degree of control. However, the chants themselves require precise mana manipulation in the first place.

Why is it that I wasn't able to use attack magic?

Thinking it over now, I'm probably hopelessly poor at mana manipulation. It's only been a few months since I came to this world where mana exists. Besides, I have an incomparably higher amount of mana than the average healer. It must be like a newborn baby trying to control an amount of mana that even several hundred adults couldn't handle.

That reminds me, back when I just arrived in this world, there were situations like when I ended up giving the same amount of treatment as EX Heal with a normal Heal, or when I tried to treat a patient's fingertip and ended up removing all the scars on their entire body. And that time when I regenerated Eight's leg, I ended up healing other places unrelated to his severe injury as

well.

Thinking carefully, even though healing magic is supposed to get an assist from the power of faith, I've been inadvertently shooting it off quite frequently.

...I'm glad that healing magic is the type I use. If it had been attack magic rather than healing magic that I was able to use in Japan, I might have self-destructed and instantly died the second I arrived in this world. Though at this point, I've become able to exercise a certain degree of control.

"Now then, are you prepared?"

"Yeah... although, I doubt I can use anything other than healing magic."

"You won't know that until you try."

However, Fran intends to teach me magic. Furthermore, for some reason there's an implication that I have no choice in the matter. If I decline here, a fireball could come flying my way.

No, the fact that I might be able to use attack magic is fine in and of itself. And if I learn how to use attack magic, with my mana pool I feel like I'll become the strongest wizard ever.

"Well then, try holding this."

Then, Fran hands over a thin metal plate. It's about the size of a business card. I thought it was just an iron plate, but it's intricately etched with thin lines for some reason. I wonder if it's a magic item or something?

"This is frequently used as teaching material at magic academies; when you accurately pour mana along these lines, they shine faintly. To begin with, I wish to see your ability. Go ahead and give it a try."

Now that I get a good look at this plate, the pattern becomes more complex as it goes from left to right. I'm guessing that once you're able to pour your mana along this maze-like pattern it means you're capable of finely manipulating mana, and sooner or later you'll be able to use attack magic.

For starters, I'll try infusing just the tiniest bit of mana.

—*Snap.*

Where did that sound come from? Of course, from my palm. It was the sound of the metal plate that Fran handed me breaking clean in half.

"Ah, w-wait! You put in too much mana! I said just to make mana flow along the lines, so why did you put your full power into it!"

That wasn't particularly my full power or anything. I didn't even infuse 1% of it.

"Nothing to be done about it... I have a spare, so use this one."

Saying that, Fran hands over a metal plate once again. I expected her to go all "I've had enough! If you won't do it seriously then I'm going home!" or something, but looks like she's going to continue. She might have an unexpectedly nurturing side to her.

As I'm feeling my impression of Fran change slightly, I reach my hand out to the metal plate that she's holding. At that very moment.

"Ah..."

My hand touches hers. Her slender hand instantly stiffens.

"Yeah, my bad."

—*Snap*.

At the same time I apologize, there's the sound of a metal plate breaking.

I thought it was my fault for a second, but I haven't done anything. Which means that the one whose mana flowed just now was Fran.

"I-I can see just how poor your mana manipulation is."

"No, wasn't that one your fault?"

Fran tries to mislead me, but I didn't even insert any mana in the first place.

"T-That's not it! I wouldn't let my mana leak out just because I was surprised. You're the one who's leaking."

Fran objects as her face reddens. I see, so she was surprised when our hands touched. I feel like rebutting her, but I'm not up for having attack magic fired at me again. I don't know what this girl might do if I get her too angry; I'll stay silent.

"This is the last one I currently have with me, so use discretion."

Still in an irritated mood, Fran roughly holds out another metal plate. Making sure our hands don't touch this time, I carefully receive it.

I observe it carefully, and just like the previous metal plates, it's engraved with a complex pattern. Although, even though she told me to exercise discretion when imbuing it with my mana, I wonder how exactly I should do that? If I do it normally, it'll probably break again. I have too much mana in the first place, so this is like sculpting with a heavy machine gun.

While I'm worrying about it.

—*Snap.*

There's the sound of something breaking again. The metal plate in my hand is split clean in half. I didn't touch Fran's hand this time, and I didn't even infuse any mana.

"Why! Didn't I tell you to use discretion!"

"W-Wait. I haven't even infused it with any mana yet... are these defective products, or what?"

"How could that-! ...n...no, by some chance..."

When I object, Fran makes a contemplative expression, as if she's realized something. Then, she gently takes out a round, crystalline object. When Fran brings it close to me, the crystal starts to shine brilliantly.

"...I knew it."

After she sees the light from the crystal, Fran glances at Sera. Sera shows some surprise upon seeing the glowing crystal, then averts her eyes and shakes her head. What's that about? This atmosphere is a little unpleasant.

"It's mana leakage disease. And furthermore, this concentration... it's quite serious."

Fran's expression turns somber as she speaks.

"Mana leakage disease?"

"A congenital mana disorder wherein the body is unable to retain mana

internally. One might say it's as if there is a hole in the vessel of your mana. But I must say, this radiance... at this concentration, I fear your mana is discharging nearly as fast as it regenerates. I'm sure that typically, you have almost no mana at all.

I wonder what that means? Far from having no mana, my mana capacity alone is probably top-class for all of humanity. Is it because I'm not originally from this world?

...Wait.

"Hey, do normal magic users not leak any mana at all?"

"...Even the average user emits a small amount. But this amount is abnormal. I cannot conceive of it as anything other than mana leakage disease."

I see. Most likely, this isn't the mana leakage disease that Fran mentioned.

The cause is my mana capacity being too high. My automatic mana recovery rate is absolutely massive compared to other people. Even if a normal healer's automatically regenerated mana overflows the amount will be insignificant, but it's different in my case.

For that reason, I'm emitting so much mana that Fran mistook it as a disorder. Generally, by no means would she ever imagine that the person in front of her has a mana pool that hundreds of wizards combined couldn't match.

"You have no aptitude for magic."

Then, Fran bluntly declares.

"...Hrm, and yet you can use healing magic..."

But, she immediately recalls the fact that I've been using healing magic, and starts brooding with her hand on her chin.

"Eh... hmm? But... how strange... you've even used area-type magic with significant mana expenditure..."

Uh oh. I have to derail this train of thought. Despite the fact that I don't really want my ability to be known by anyone influential, it's going to be discovered by a noble's daughter of all people.

Then Fran makes an astonished face like she's realized something, and looks to me. And, with an apologetic expression, she murmurs in a small voice.

"...It seems I've somewhat misjudged you. You must be quite the devout believer in god."

Way off.

"Did you dedicate yourself to studying twice as hard as others at church?"

I've never even been to a church in the first place. That's not it.

"I thought you to be a man with nothing but obscene thoughts in his head, but... that isn't so. For that alone, you have my apology as a daughter of Meirhartz. I am sorry."

How very polite. Let me likewise offer my regrets for causing you to misunderstand. My head is indeed filled with nothing but obscene thoughts.

...I can't say that out loud, though.

Well, she did have a misunderstanding, but this is a good one.

If she did find out about my ability, and the matter of my town-wide healing magic came to light... Fran's from a noble family. For sure, I wouldn't put it past the lord to make me marry this girl because of that. She's the type of woman who'd shoot a fireball over a little teasing, so then what if it comes to marriage? I'd die for certain on our first night.

...Looking at Fran being all meek, I'm starting to feel a little guilty, but I'll leave this misunderstanding as is. I can't let it change my life.

"But if it's mana leakage disease, attack magic is impossible to begin with. What shall we do?"

Fran mutters. To be honest I don't really need her thanks or anything, but it seems she still intends to keep going.

"Fran, the sun has begun to set. Why don't we continue this another day?"

But then Sera speaks up to Fran... oh yeah, the day is getting late.

"That's true, Sera... it can't be helped, let us return for today."

By 'today', that means there'll be a next day too? But I'm fine with holding off on the next time until she fixes her habit of firing off attack magic.

"Ah, I'm giving this magic tool to you. As your emission of mana decreases, so too shall the intensity of the light. Though it may be a hereditary impediment, with a few years of effort, you ought to be able to significantly suppress the amount lost."

"S-Sure."

Addressing me in a tender voice, Fran hands over the crystal. I can't believe it, this almost feels like sympathy. She may have misjudged me, but it feels like I'm interacting with a normal girl now. Even though when I healed her at our first meeting she was such a man-hater that she said "I didn't ask you" instead of thanking me, now she's displaying concern for me, a man. Maybe she actually has grown?

I get the feeling Sera's eyes are sparkling as she observes Fran and me.

Feeling a little down, I return to the hospital. In the end, no more ideas for how to raise Eris' healing magic ability came to mind. It's difficult for me to teach her knowledge, and increasing her mana is beyond my financial means. Even having her amass piety like that saint from the Church of Medine has some drawbacks. Seems like the only approach for these things is to go about it the honest way. Well, I'm not okay with Eris going away to train because of that, though.

As I'm reflecting on my way back to the hospital,

"Eris-san, the evil god, what happens to the evil god after that!?"

"The saints borrow the power of the Goddess Medine to seal it away. Saints are great individuals that the church used to turn out in great numbers long ago, supposedly."

"Who is greater, those saints or Master?"

"Eh!? Errr, well, that's..."



Eris and Yuel are reading a book of some kind. I get the impression that Yuel

has been giving enthusiastic commentary as Eris opens the book and shows it to her. Come to think of it, I've hardly ever seen Eris reading books before. I wonder what they're reading? I'm a bit interested.

"Whatcha reading?"

"Ah, Master, welcome home!"

"Oh, you're back. It's the Bible of the Church of Medine."

The Bible. So they have something like that too?

"This book seems like a made-up fable so I don't care for it that much, but I thought every little bit might help to raise my piety. And it can serve as study material for Yuel-chan as well."

Looks like Eris is diligently exerting herself for the sake of her healing magic. I don't think she needs to go that far, though. Well, the accidental death of her parents is also a factor in making her want to improve her healing magic ability. Maybe it was inevitable.

"By the way, Eris, any interest in the beauty contest?"

I remembered it when I saw Eris' face. If she participates in the beauty contest on the day of the festival, perhaps she could gather something similar to faith. I'll just drop a mention for the time being.

"Not at all... I did go to see it just once, but standing nearly naked in public? No amount of money in the world could get me to participate in that."

Of course.

Man, now for sure I've exhausted all my options. Isn't there any other way?

...I guess not. I've made all sorts of utterly ineffective attempts, and in the end I'm all out. But there's no way I can abandon my lifestyle of seeing Eris' giant tits up close. And it's not like Eris said she was leaving for the royal capital right away. There's still time. Let's keep trying to come up with other methods.

After dinner, we're in the bedroom getting ready to sleep.

"Master, amazing, you're amazing! Master is shining!"

Since I couldn't come up with any methods no matter how hard I thought, I

decided to play with Yuel by showing off the crystal I received from Fran.

This crystal gives off stronger and stronger light the closer it gets to me. Seeing it again, the way it sparkles looks cool.

When I hold the crystal behind my back to create a halo around me, Yuel is delighted. And using it to play catch, it shines brightly every time Yuel tosses it to me, almost as if she's using magic. She's finding that extremely fun.

I kinda feel like it's shining brighter than when Fran gave it to me, but Yuel's enjoying it. Even Fran does good things too, occasionally.

"What are you doing..."

But as we're playing like that, Eris enters the room with an exasperated expression. Looks like she's done changing her clothes and getting ready to sleep.

We were having a nice time, but oh well. I'll put the crystal away into my item box.

"Wait a second."

But then she tells me to stop.

"What's the matter? You wanna play catch too, Eris?"

I wonder what's up? Did the sparkling ball stir up her playful side?

"...That's not it. That magic tool. Don't tell me..."

Eris takes the crystal from my hands. Then she starts putting it on the floor, holding it up to the ceiling, carrying it out of the room, and doing other mysterious actions.

Did she want to play after all? If she wants to play then she should just be honest and say so. I fully intend to accompany her whether it's child's play or adult play, from playing doctor to unmentionable things.

"I knew it... the mana concentration in this room is abnormal. It's several levels higher than the holy ground I trained at."

However, she declares that with a serious face. Rather than playing, it seems she was measuring the mana concentration.

"Holy ground, that's the place where you went to train in order to increase your mana, Eris?"

"Yes... now that I think about it, your mana capacity is incredible too... perhaps the mana given off by your body has collected in this room and turned it into a makeshift holy ground."

"Errr, in other words...?"

"It means that the more I'm near you, the more my mana capacity will increase... come to think of it, it does feel like it's a bit higher compared to before. I don't know the cause, and I thought it was just my imagination, but..."

Holy cow. The size of the increase is probably minor, but if it raised by a noticeable amount over a few months, then after a few years she may even become able to use High Heal.

"...So then, what about the royal capital?"

"There's no need for me to go anymore."

I see. So that means I didn't need to search for a replacement scheme; it was all settled from the beginning?

...It woulda been fine for me not to do anything. Even though I worked my ass off coming up with and testing ideas. No, if Fran hadn't given me this crystal, we wouldn't have noticed.

Well, my past hardships aren't worth worrying about. Eris isn't going to the royal capital. Let's just accept that result.

Besides, just now Eris was saying that the closer she is to me the better.

"If being closer is better, wanna sleep in the same bed?"

"...I won't."

Did she hesitate for a second there? Seems like she hesitated.

...Something tells me I should use healing magic as a pretext to push my luck.

"Master, I, I'll sleep together with you."

But in a flash, Yuel clings onto me from behind. Well, it is what it is. Yeah, there's no way I can execute the operation to lure Eris into my bed in front of Yuel.

Then, Yuel speaks.

"It looks like I'll become able to use magic too."

...You'll even be able to use magic, Yuel-san? Certainly, it does appear that your mana will increase from being by my side, and you get along well with Eris and Fran who could both teach you magic. If you felt like it, you could probably learn to use both healing magic and attack magic within a few years.

Are you gonna become qualified as a melee fighter, a ranged fighter, and a support healer, Yuel-san? And furthermore, your high perception makes you skilled at finding enemies in the dark.

How strong are you going to become? Aint'cha gonna end up being the strongest?

"...Hey, what are you planning to do from now on?"

Suddenly, Eris murmurs.

"What do you mean?"

"L-Look, say for example you move somewhere else, won't that mean I wouldn't be able to raise my mana anymore? I mean, it's not right to leave things unfinished and all..."

I wonder if she's indirectly telling me that she's going to train in the royal capital so I should get out? No, if she was going to tell me to get out she would say it clearly. She shouldn't be at the end of her rope with me yet.

...Ah, but now that I think of it, I did peep in on Eris changing clothes a week ago. Nah, I only took a quick glance, but it's not impossible that I was discovered.

"I-I wasn't particularly planning on leaving, though...?"

I tentatively speak while observing Eris' expression. But Eris immediately turns her back and extinguishes the room's lamp, diving into bed. Is she actually mad? Going to bed in a huff?

"W-Well it's fine then. Sorry for asking you a strange question... good night."

Then I hear Eris' voice. I can't tell very well from just her voice, but at least she doesn't seem angry. Maybe she was just simply worried about her mana training.

"Ready to sleep, Yuel?"

"Yes, Master."

When we get into bed, for some reason Yuel hugs me tighter than normal. A bit earlier it was like having a hot water bottle so it was just fine, but the current season is a bit toasty. It doesn't bother me that much, but I wonder if I should do something about it?

"...Master, I want to stay by your side forever."

As soon as I think that, Yuel murmurs softly. What's with that all of a sudden? No, maybe it's not that sudden. I get the feeling she's telling me that comparatively frequently. She's probably worried I'll throw her out of bed due to the heat.

...Well, the heat isn't that bad. I put my restlessness out of mind and go to sleep.

Chapter 48: Beauty Contest

About what happened this morning.

"Master, would you like to go look around the festival together today?"

Yuel shyly asked me after I had just woken up. Nervously twitching her fingertips and thighs, Yuel gazed at me with those round, blue eyes, awaiting my response.

As for why Yuel was asking me something like that, it's because today is the day of the festival. The few days of preparation have passed, and today, a great number of events are taking place in the city.

"Master? Is that... a no?"

When I didn't reply, Yuel made a slightly anxious face. Of course there was no way I'd refuse.

"No, it's no problem at all. Alright, let's go see the festival today!"

"Yes, Master!"

Yuel's bright smile was radiant. Surely, today will be extremely fun. That's the kind of feeling that Yuel's smile was beaming out.

...However, at the time I didn't realize that I was forgetting something very important.

After that, Yuel invites Eris, and the three of us go around the city. I didn't expect Eris to close the hospital and come along with us, but today is a festival after all. Eris must have wanted to have some fun; she readily consents to Yuel's invitation.

Now, it's time to decide on our destination... and finally I remember.

Ruruka was telling me about it earlier... on the day of the festival, there's a beauty contest.

Eris talked about it too... the contestants in the beauty contest are awfully exposed.

So that's what it was. Today is the big event to decide on the number one beauty in town. I'm sure there'll be a ton of high-level buxom beauties gathered there. And what's more, they'll apparently be exposing a lot of skin. There's no way I don't want to go to an event like that.

My destination today can be none other than the beauty contest.

...However, I'm already grouped up with Yuel and Eris.

Bringing the two of them with me would be problematic.

Of course, my reason for going to the beauty contest is to rubberneck. Even if I can come up with a suitable excuse to deceive Yuel, Eris will likely completely understand that my goal is to observe scantily-clad hotties the instant the words "beauty contest" leave my mouth. If I say we should go see the beauty contest, there's no doubt she'll be disgusted.

Furthermore, since Yuel said she has somewhere she wants to go, we're already on our way there. There's no way I can disregard Yuel's wishes at this point and steer the rudder towards the beauty contest instead.

Should I betray Yuel's expectations and resign myself to being scorned by Eris by going to see the beauty contest, or should I give up on it?

This is surely the ultimate choice. But, as Yuel's master, the decision I must make is obvious. Resolving myself, I drive my feet forward in the direction Yuel is pointing, towards the martial arts arena.

We're in the stands at the martial arts tournament, inside a large building that has the feel of a coliseum. Looks like this tournament has a round-robin format; we're overlooking a large number of combatants exchanging blows with wooden swords down below.

Seems like Yuel's aim is to study this martial arts tournament. Since fighting the Armor Ogre, Yuel has often been practicing her knife thrusts in the garden. She's likely trying to learn from watching other people's fighting styles.

Oh yeah, the earnings she received from all her recent part-time work at the tavern went toward buying knives attached to long cords that can be retracted

back to the hand after throwing, smoke bombs for running away from strong monsters, and low-grade recovery potions for when I lose consciousness. Looks like she's making arrangements to fight a wide variety of monsters. I don't plan on sticking my head out into danger very much anymore, but Yuel is steadily preparing to fight. She's probably getting ready to be able to protect her master no matter what happens. I think she's going a bit overboard, but I don't feel like stopping her when she's so enthusiastic about it.

That's exactly why at the martial arts tournament today I hope that Yuel will watch, study, and enjoy herself to her heart's content. That's the reason I decided to come here. I didn't want to see Yuel's disappointed face.

So I would never do something like head to the beauty contest lightly.

"O-Ow ow ow ow!! ...Ahh, m-my stomaaach...!!"

"M-Masterrr, what's wrong!? A-Are you okay!?"

"Ahhhh, this is bad! Kuh... the pain... I-I'll be alright somehow...! ...Y-Yuel, I may need to be in the toilet for a while. I'm going to the restroom, so make sure you stay close to Eris and don't get lost. Got it?"

"M-Masterrr, I'll escort you!"

"I-It's fine. Believe in your master. Okay? Yuel, don't leave Eris no matter what, alright? It'd be terrible if you got lost! No matter what, okay?"

—I'm calling it the Eternal Toilet strategy.

I'll act like my stomach is upset, and head to the beauty contest. It's simple, but this way Yuel can watch her much-anticipated martial arts tournament and I can go see the beauty contest with my dignity intact.

The weak point of this strategy is that if time drags on as I'm watching the beauty contest, it's possible that Yuel will come all the way to the restrooms out of concern. But by giving her such detailed instructions, she shouldn't do something like that.

I'm concerned about how Eris was looking at me dismally, but there's no use worrying over minor details. More importantly, it's beauty contest time.

The number one buxom beauty in town. Beautiful girls in skimpy outfits.

There's no room in my head for anything else.

Let's get going, hurry up, right away. I can't contain my excitement anymore.

Just like that, I escape by myself from the martial arts tournament arena.

The beauty contest is located in a plaza a few minutes away from the martial arts arena. A big, temporary stage was constructed in the plaza, and it's already surrounded by a great number of people. However, it doesn't look like the event has started yet. It seems I arrived a bit early.

I'm sure I'll be at this place for a long time. Before I enter, I'll buy some drinks and snacks from a food cart.

With that in mind, I check out the nearby carts. And when I do...

at some point, I spot a priestess. Before I know it, the black-haired, flat-chested woman who was called a saint is standing next to me.

"You have quite beautiful hair."

...Then she hits on me. No, just because I'm suddenly praised, it's too hasty to assume she's hitting on me. All she did was call out to me.

"Ah, please excuse my impertinence. I am known as Philine. That color is not often seen around these parts, so you caught my interest."

While I'm still stupefied at the sudden greeting, the priestess introduces herself.

But man, I wonder why she called out to me? She must be an eminent priestess in the Church of Medine. Enough to be called a saint.

Besides, right now there are multiple people nearby in priest garb who seem to be guards. My wariness is taking precedence over the happiness from having a girl call out to me.

"H-How do you do."

Then, after Philine carefully assesses my appearance,

"Might you be a healer?"

she asks me that. I'm wearing my usual monastic habit that's common among healers. She could likely tell from this garment. I don't know why she asked me

about it, but I can't exactly ignore someone with high social standing. And I'm scared of what could happen after.

"Yeah."

For the time being, I answer her.

When I do, Philine peers directly into my face. It's almost as if her rational eyes are evaluating me.

What's going on? What reason would a higher-up in the church have for assessing me? There shouldn't be any...

Wait, there is one. Quite a dangerous one. At the time of the Krankheit Turtle incident, the healing magic that covered the entire town. It's that.

Certainly, this city seems to be treating it as sacred, calling it Goddess Medine's miracle. The members of the church must want to find out who was responsible for it by any means necessary.

...H-Huh, isn't that bad? A higher-up of that church called out to me, and furthermore she's peering at me in order to evaluate me. Moreover, she asked me "might you be a healer?" just now.

Don't tell me that back then, I was spotted by someone at the moment I used an Area Heal? Something tells me I'm in an extremely unpleasant situation.

"H-Heyyy, did you need something? I'm a little short on time right now."

Before I crumble under pressure, I need to withdraw. Whether or not I've been found out, I get the feeling that talking to this person is unwise.

"Ah, a thousand apologies for suddenly calling out to you. Until our next meeting."

I thought I'd be detained, but Philine doesn't try to stop me.

...So I haven't been found out? Did she really just call out to me because we have a similar hair color? Who knows. However, it seems better for me not to get involved with that priestess named Philine.

Slightly apprehensive though I may be, I return to the beauty contest area.

There was an accident, but my heightened mood won't be quelled by something of that degree. Right now I'm just going to enjoy myself as much as possible.

Looks like the contest is just starting; I can see a beast girl with cow-like horns walking out onto the stage swinging those massive udders. Her preferred outfit is a bikini-style swimsuit. Luminous magic tools that are set up on the temporary stage further enhance the whiteness of her pale skin.

It seems she's the first one. As expected for someone participating in a beauty contest, she certainly is quite lovely. And those breasts that sway back and forth with every step she takes probably exceed Eris'. In terms of balance Eris would win the judges' decision, but that size alone is an aspiration.

...Wait, haven't I seen those somewhere before?

And, while I'm contemplating and appreciating the big-breasted babe,

"Ah, Master! Is your stomach alright now!?"

From behind, I hear the one voice I shouldn't be hearing. I turn around, and as I feared, Yuel is there. The question of why she's here arises, but it's shortly answered when I look right behind her.

"Leaving Yuel-chan behind, what are you doing..."

It's Eris. She's looking at me and making an exasperated sigh.

"Earlier, you asked me whether I was participating in the beauty contest, didn't you? That's why I expected you to come here."

I see. That's Eris-san for you, she really understands my character.

"Master, is your stomach okay...?"

"Y-Yeah. I felt better on my way to the toilet, ha, ha ha ha."

Or rather I should say that if I did have stomach pains I could just cure them with healing magic. Eris realized that, so that's likely why she was giving me a dirty look back at the martial arts tournament arena. Maybe because it was impromptu, but it seems there was a hole in my strategy.

...Although Yuel doesn't appear to have noticed. I wish she'd learn to be a little more skeptical.

But man, this is bad. Stomachache aside, I need to explain why I'm here. My dignity as Yuel's master is on the line.

"Yeah, Yuel, I'm sorry. It's just that, the truth is, somebody I know is participating in this contest. So I wanted to cheer them on no matter what."

That's a lie, of course. But it should definitely give off a better impression than "I'm here to appreciate the sexy babes". And so long as there's no chance to speak with the contestants on stage, the lie shouldn't be so easily uncovered.

Eris' gaze grows even colder, but recovering with her is impossible this time. Yuel is the only one I can deceive now.

As I'm giving Yuel my explanation,

"Ah, it's true!"

Yuel raises a happy voice and points toward the stage.

"Ruruka-san, it's Ruruka-san!"

...There actually was someone I know.

Looks like Ruruka is the second contestant; I can see her walking around on stage in a black bikini. Her face is slightly flushed, and she's covering her body in embarrassment as she walks. However, her expression isn't just embarrassed, but somehow angry...?

"So it was true..."

Eris mutters in surprise. It was just a lie I told that happened to turn out to be true, but let's not mention that.

Although, I wasn't expecting Ruruka to participate in something like this. Maybe she's aiming for the prize money or something? No, at any rate, she doesn't have enough appeal. I mean, that Cowgirl-chan earlier was squeezing her tits together as service for the crowd. I can't feel any motivation from Ruruka to take the top prize in a contest like this. She's just hiding her body as much as possible and nervously looking around the audience.



"Ah, Shiki!"

And as I'm watching her doing that on stage, our eyes meet. What's more, she calls my name.

...What's with that? She can't possibly intend to pick up where we left off in front of that inn right now? That would definitely be bad. And in front of such a huge crowd. Plus, Yuel and Eris are here too.

"Hey, what did you do to that girl? Her face is absolutely livid."

But apparently that's not it. Indeed, when I take a look at Ruruka, her body is trembling and she's chewing her lower lip while glaring at me. What's with that expression? It's a mixture of embarrassment and resentment.

"No, I have no memory of making her angry though."

"Then why is she glaring at you?"

As I'm conversing with Eris like that, Ruruka begins to tremble once again. She's clenching her fists and glaring right at me.

Why's she glaring at me? I don't think I've done anything to Ruruka to deserve a glare like that. In the first place, I had no idea that she was participating in the beauty contest until just now.

...Wait, beauty contest?

"Are you sure you didn't do something after all?"

Eris asks me, nervous for some reason.

...That's it, it's Eris.

I remember. Certainly, I said it back when Ruruka told me about the existence of the beauty contest. That "I'll try to encourage Eris" to enter.

At that time, Ruruka had received a shock from Aria calling her my mistress with Eris. Furthermore, right after, I was invited to enter an inn with baths together. Even I realized that she must have felt no small amount of goodwill towards me. I'm sure she did that due to her rivalry with Eris.

Now I feel like I understand why Ruruka entered the beauty contest.

If this isn't me being overly self-conscious, Ruruka may have wanted to establish her superiority over Eris through this beauty contest. And she wanted

to clear away the stigma from being called a mistress.

It was most likely for that purpose alone that Ruruka endured the high exposure of an embarrassing bathing suit and faced the beauty contest. And yet the vital Eris isn't participating. Furthermore, she's chatting amiably at my side.

...Yeah, that would make her angry.

But I did encourage Eris to enter the beauty contest. It's just that she refused. Ruruka must have been under the impression that she would be participating, though.

While I'm thinking it over.

"O-Oi, ain't that the Saint-sama!?"

"S-Saint-samaaa!"

"You're so beautiful, Saint-sama!!"

A huge cheer assaults my ears. Looking at the stage, the priestess from before is there. It's Philine.

Compared to Ruruka or Cowgirl-chan, Philine is wearing a rather modest one-piece. I'm surprised that someone referred to as a saint of this country's state religion would be participating in such a vulgar event as a beauty contest, but this too is probably linked to gathering faith. She seems to be doing the same thing I tried to get Eris to do.

Although, if someone with a title like Saint appears, this race is already over. Looks like there are a number of shills here as well, so her victory in this contest is surely already decided. I don't think that Ruruka's figure is inferior compared to the saint's, but for a popularity contest such as this, name value carries more meaning than anything else.

Everything from here on is a throwaway match. The moment I think that.

"H-Hey, those... what are they? D-Don't tell me..."

"I-Impossible! Why, in the middle of the city!?"

The audience starts to clamor noisily. Then, a lone spectator points at the sky. In that direction, there's an enormous number of black shadows.

My first thought is that it's a flock of birds, but be that as it may, they're large in size. I strain my eyes to get a better look, and they're actually big, bat-shaped creatures with fangs sticking out of their mouths.

...Those are... monsters.

Chapter 49: Saint

Cries ring out in succession from the nearby audience members. The black dots floating in the sky, those are unmistakably monsters.

"Kuh, why are so many monsters...!?"

One of the knights on guard speaks out.

The audience is already in a state of panic. They're starting to run in every direction. All the hectic rushing around conversely makes it harder to escape.

Trying not to get separated from Eris or Yuel, I move a little in order to get away. While we're still relocating, the knights have already started to engage the monsters in battle. And, as the bow-wielding knights are about to fire arrows at the monsters,

"Wait, don't shoot arrows! You'll hit somebody!"

a different knight's voice restrains them.

...With this number of spectators, if they loose arrows upwards, rather than hitting monsters they're more likely to hit people on their way back down.

"Shit, is it a raid targeting Saint-sama!? Protect the audience!"

A portion of the knights fire off magic into the sky, but unfortunately it's not enough to handle the trouble. The number of monsters isn't decreasing at all. Moreover, while the knights are busy facing the bird-model monsters, boar-like monsters charge in from the main street adjacent to this plaza.

"I-Impossible! Flying types are one thing, but even monsters like that have entered the city!?"

One of the security knights cries out. Yeah, where exactly did these monsters show up from? For bird monsters, I wouldn't think much of them crossing over the ramparts, but for those boar-type monsters to be inside the city is obviously strange. I've never heard of monsters from inside the labyrinth coming out, and the city is surrounded by ramparts with knights standing watch. Such a sudden attack by monsters shouldn't be happening.

This attack is happening too fast. It's as if the monsters have been inside the city this whole time, but that's not...

"No, wait... it is. That's right, they were in the middle of the city."

That's right, I witnessed a monster in the middle of the city. Taking a closer look, I can see collar-like magic tools attached to all of the monsters. As I thought, those are the same as that time...

—That instant.

A large shadow falls upon the ground. When I look up, I see the form of a large-scale monster circling above the plaza.

I remember those colors, that shape.

...Dragon. It's the one we ran into before in the old town, that dragon.

Just now, that knight yelled something about an attack aiming for the saint. And there are those collars controlling the monsters too. No doubt about it, this monster attack is man-made.

That dragon was tied up in the old town in order to hide it. By some chance, were all of these monsters concealed inside the ruins of the old town...?

But even if there was a place to hide them, it'd be impossible to carry such a large number of monsters into the middle of the city.

...Wait, just recently there might have been a chance. The Krankheit Turtle's poison mist incident. At that time, when coping with the panicked citizens, the knight brigade was temporarily unable to carry out its function.

At that time, taking advantage of the chaos, it would've been possible to bring monsters into the city.

"This might be a bit b-bad."

While I'm still thinking about it, possibly unable to handle the sheer volume of monsters, the defensive line of knights lets a number of monsters slip through. Around 10 of the boar monsters approach.

We haven't gotten out of the plaza yet. Since our way is blocked by the spectators fleeing randomly, we can't get out of the plaza even if we try.

And while we're doing that, the boar monsters come plunging towards us.

"Master, please stand back!"

Yuel meets them by throwing knives, but there are many of them. Her attacks successfully protect me, but the surviving boars are still charging toward Eris.

"...!"

...This is bad. Eris has no power to fight monsters.

"Eris!"

As for what I should do, it's obvious. I'll fight the monsters. I've even faced off with that dreadful Armor Ogre. Monsters on the level of those boars shouldn't scare me at this point.

...On the contrary, this is my chance.

If I risk my body and save Eris in this predicament, her goodwill towards me will no doubt skyrocket. Well, becoming a shield against a boar once shouldn't be enough to kill me. At worst I'll break two or three bones.

Alright, let's do this. Imagining what will happen after I save Eris, I stir up my heart with earthly desires. Preparing my resolve, I take a step forward to drive my mace into the monsters.

And the next instant— a spray of blood rises up.

...That doesn't mean I hit the monsters. Someone wedged themselves between Eris and the monsters. In an instant, that person cleaves several of the approaching boar monsters clean in two.

Aria is there, in a suit of knight armor.

"Aria..."

Eris murmurs.

"You alright? Onee-chan."

Aria flicks her sword to remove the blood, smiling at Eris. When she does, Eris comes to her senses and opens her mouth.

"Y-Yes, thank you."

Seeing Eris' relief, Aria chuckles. Somehow, she looks like a child having mischievous thoughts. And, as if she was waiting for Eris to say those exact words, she responds.

"I don't need your thanks, Onee-chan."

In order to defeat the next monster, Aria turns her back to Eris. And, as if making a declaration, she immediately follows it up.

"Cause I'm a knight."

"..."

Aria annihilates the nearby monsters with incredible intensity. She slices all of the monsters in half. Forcefully, not to mention quickly, she reduces the monsters' numbers. Even among the knights, her movements stand out as exceptional. It seems as if she's showing off to Eris, too.

"Aria..."

Eris covers her mouth with her hands, tearing up as she watches Aria intently. Perhaps she's deeply moved by how splendid her younger sister has become. A beautiful woman doing that really paints a perfect picture.

...But I'm the one who was supposed to be receiving that look after defeating the monsters. She was supposed to swoon over me when I showed her my manly side.

No, well, nothing I can do about it this time, so I'll yield. And Eris seems happy.

And yet, at the same time Aria is acting in front of us.

—The dragon circling in the sky dives toward the stage where the saint is standing.

The sound of the temporary stage collapsing rings out around us, accompanied by a loud shriek.

...This is bad. Ruruka was over there, too. She's not wearing a shred of protection right now either. She could have been seriously wounded by that attack.

"Aria! I'll leave Eris to you! Yuel, come with me!"

If I entrust her to Aria, there's a million-to-one chance that Eris will come to harm. From her fight with the boars just now alone, I can easily tell that Aria has extraordinary ability.

I hurry to the temporary stage where Ruruka is. Over there, there should be a number of injured buxom beauties other than Ruruka. I've gotta treat them right away.

Near the broken stage, there are multiple lightly-dressed women along with the saint and her escort knights. Ruruka is there, too. However, their injuries... there aren't any.

Looks like that saint has already given them treatment. After the dragon attacked, it rose high up into the sky again, and now it's turning around and getting ready to dive at this stage again.

"Shiki! Hey, that dragon... that's the one we saw in the old city, isn't it?"

"Yeah, it's the one from back then."

"T-That's weird! Dragons shouldn't be attacking people like this!"

Ruruka's expression is frantic for some reason. Oh yeah, Ruruka loves dragons, huh?

Well, this attack has nothing to do with the monsters' wills. Those collars are magic tools to command the monsters. Somewhere, there should be someone controlling the dragon and the other monsters.

"Please be careful! The Earth Dragon uses petrifying breath!"

One of the saint's guards raises his voice. Breath, huh? Although, even if you call it petrifying, I don't really get what that means. But then the Saint herself supplements the guard's words.

"If the breath falls upon you, and it is not treated by EX Heal or personal medicine before your body completely turns to stone, it will assuredly end in your death. Please avoid being hit by it under any circumstances."

That's some bad breath. In other words, the flying monsters and terrestrial monsters are likely there to distract the knights and keep them busy while this

one aims for the real target, the saint.

...The way this is going, we're no doubt going to get dragged into it. We need to get the hell out of here.

"Ruruka, hurry and run. We'll get dragged into this if we stay here."

I call out to Ruruka,

"The Earth Dragon's weakness is fire magic. Should I shoot it down with a flame spell?"

but at nearly the same time, one of the wizard-looking guards asks the saint for instructions.

"...! U-Umm, isn't there any other way!?"

And Ruruka reacts to the guard's words... she probably doesn't want the highly-intelligent dragon to be killed. It was only for a short time, but she handfed it and was affectionate with it. Ruruka might have become strongly attached to that dragon.

"Those collars that are controlling the monsters are often used by believers of the evil god. If the collar can just be destroyed, I believe it will stop attacking, but... please understand."

The saint explains to Ruruka with a sympathetic face. She's likely indirectly saying that it's hopeless. For the safety of the people on the ground, they can't fire arrows into the sky. By necessity, magic becomes the only means of attacking the airborne dragon. And when using magic, a feat like destroying the collar alone with pinpoint accuracy is impossible in the first place. Moreover, the opponent is a formidable enemy that uses petrifying breath. They likely don't have any room to be concerned about the dragon's life.

"Yuel, do you think you can do something about that collar using your knives?"

"...I'm sorry, the reach isn't long enough."

I take a shot at asking Yuel, but I guess it's impossible after all. However, Yuel seems to come up with something and opens her mouth.

"Ah, but if I throw the knife from that rooftop, it may possibly reach. And because it's a high place, if I use a corded knife it won't hit anyone below either."

Yuel is pointing at a 5-story inn. Certainly, from there it seems like it could reach. And the dragon is apparently continuing to aim for an opening among the saint's group, circling at a low altitude.

"Yuel, I'm counting on you."

"Yes, Master!"



When I tell Yuel, she takes off toward the building at full speed. Slipping

through the gaps between people, jumping off of people's shoulders, at full speed. The building is right in front of the plaza. The way she's going, she should reach it in no time.

Well, I don't know whether the saint's guards will kill it first or Yuel will get a direct knife hit on the collar first, but I've done what I can for the time being.

From here on, I should get the hesitating Ruruka to run away with me. Either way, being near this saint is unpleasant. Like I said, I don't want to get involved.

"Ruruka, enough already. Let's get out of here!"

—Then, the moment I pull on Ruruka's hand in order to run over to Aria and the others.

"Fire Lance!!"

A giant lance of flame appears over the head of one of the saint's guards, and flies toward the dragon. The dragon avoids it, but another flame lance appears above a different guard and flies off to shoot down the dragon.

And the second flame lance pierces the tip of the dragon's wing membrane.

The next moment.

Seemingly enraged from being shot at, the dragon swoops down toward the ground. It drops at an angle that looks like it will impact the ground, then beats its huge wings to suddenly decelerate. It hovers a few meters off the ground and opens its jaw wide.

From its mouth, a gray breath comes billowing out.

...This is bad.

The ashen breath blankets my field of vision. I try to get some distance right away, but I don't quite make it. I'm going to be hit by the breath.

—Then, when the breath is about to reach me, somebody pushes me down.

I fall face-first on the ground, pinned under someone. I can see red hair hanging down onto my shoulders. There's a soft sensation on my back. Looks like Ruruka is the one who pushed me down.

"O-Oi, are you okay...?"

I raise my body and look at Ruruka. When I do,

"A-Ahaha... it got me."

there she is, with her feet turning gray, feebly laughing. Apparently she just barely got caught by the breath. I take a look at the petrified parts of her body, and the gray color is gradually spreading over time.

Moreover, the dragon is opening its mouth in our direction in order to emit a second blast of breath. This is unpleasant.

.....Wait.

Something even worse comes into view.

On the rooftop of the building that Yuel went into. She just jumped off of it. Literally, Yuel just dove from the top of a 5-story building with no lifeline.

With her knife pointed downward, Yuel is dropping from above onto the dragon that lowered its altitude in order to use its breath. She's probably trying to destroy its collar.

But those acrobatics are way too dangerous. Maybe she lost her patience when it looked like I was going to get hit by the breath, but she's going overboard. I didn't tell her to go that far.

"Yuel!!"

...The dragon suddenly beats its wings, and moves out of Yuel's downward trajectory. This is hopeless. If Yuel falls down like this, she'll pass beside the dragon and crash into the ground. A fall from a 5-story building won't end in just bone fractures. This is beyond reckless.

Even if I try to get to Yuel's drop site at this point, I won't make it in time. My heart tightens in my chest.

However, Yuel doesn't drop down. Throwing her corded knife at the dragon's neck, she uses her falling momentum to swing around up onto the dragon's neck.

Then, she plunges her knife into the collar and the two of them plummet

together. Using the dragon's body as a cushion, Yuel neatly dampens the impact of her landing.

...All I can say is she never fails to impress.

The second breath won't be coming anymore. My safety is guaranteed.

"I am sorry, my mana... is no longer..."

However, after the saint treats the 3 people close to her with Ex Heal, she falls to her knees. Seems like the first shot of breath encompassed an area with 10 people in it. And Ruruka wasn't among the 3 that the saint treated.

"..."

Ruruka's face warps in despair.

The petrification doesn't advance that quickly. All of the people who received the breath are still alive. I have no choice but to do it.

This isn't the time to be concerned about whether or not my true ability will be discovered. Ruruka's life is irreplaceable. When I gather mana in order to invoke EX Heal towards Ruruka first... that very instant,

"W-What was that!?"

"This is... smoke!? Are there more enemies!?"

All of a sudden, white smoke begins to billow out and cover us. For a moment I wonder if it's another monster attack, but that's not it.... this is Yuel.

—A smoke bomb.

Now that I think about it, she said she was buying them in order to run away from formidable opponents, huh...

Also, there's what I told her. That my healing magic was "my secret with Yuel".

Happily, this place is separated from the battlefield between the knights and the monsters. The smokescreen probably won't interfere with their battle. Honestly, I was thinking that I had no choice but to reveal my ability, but if I don't have reveal it then I don't have to deal with the consequences. Well played, Yuel.

Before the smoke disappears, I need to get this over with. First I treat Ruruka, then I systematically take care of everyone else in the extent of the breath.

Then, when I finish treating everyone,

"Shiki, where...?"

I hear Ruruka's frail voice. There's no power in it.

...Don't tell me the treatment failed? I have no experience treating petrification, so it's possible. I hurry back to Ruruka's side.

"W-what's wrong!? Are you hurt anywhere!?"

Maybe I wasn't able to treat her petrification somewhere. I look over every nook and cranny of Ruruka's body.

Her pretty red hair. Beneath that black bikini, her large breasts shake softly, her abs are nice and tense, and her feet stretch properly.

...Yep, she isn't petrified.

"Ah, Shiki, thank goodness. I can see your face in the end..."

However, when Ruruka sees my face, she says that. I check her body again, and nothing appears to be petrified. The exposure is erotic though.

...Don't tell me she doesn't realize that she's already been healed?

Well, since the smoke from the smoke bomb is so thick, it may be difficult for her to ascertain the condition of her petrification by sight.

"...Shiki, I'm sorry for suddenly running away back then."

I lock eyes with Ruruka.

...Having our faces close together like this is making me kinda embarrassed. And we left things off the way we did last time. If that inn hadn't been full, it might've meant we would cross the line.

And when I avert my gaze, I feel a warmth on my cheek. Ruruka's hand is touching it.

"I was never able to tell you this, but... Shiki. I, I..."

Then, Ruruka tries to tell me something while gazing straight into my eyes. What's with this? Could it possibly be *that*? I wonder if it's *that*?

But if it is *that*, her timing is extremely awkward. Ruruka is probably under the misapprehension that she's about to meet her fate from petrification. The saint who can use EX Heal declared that she's out of mana. And Ruruka has no idea that I can use EX Heal.

It must be the kind of *that*

that she can only say because she's dying. That's no good, Ruruka. You can't do that now. No mistaking it, you're in perfect health. You're absolutely going to be embarrassed after the fact, so...!

But, my prayers don't reach her.

"I... love you, Shiki."

With her hand on my cheek, Ruruka speaks in a frail voice. There's no reason for her voice to be frail, but she's likely under a strong misconception.

...Man, it was that after all? Somehow or other, I did get the feeling she was fond of me. It's just that I don't understand her reason for it. Perhaps noticing my state, Ruruka continues speaking.

"Even though I can only use shields, I became an adventurer on my own. I wasn't great at killing monsters, so until I joined up with Fran and Sera I couldn't earn any money. Weapons and armor took money, and receiving attacks from monsters just caused the injuries and scars to add up."

Oh yeah, I feel like Fran was saying that they only joined up with Ruruka just recently. Ruruka only has shield skills. It's not like she can evade enemy attacks like Yuel can, so yeah, she must constantly be taking equipment damage and getting wounded.

"The first time I met you was around four months ago, Shiki. I don't think you remember, but at that time, my body was full of bruises, it was painful, and even though I'm a girl my skin wasn't fit to be seen by anyone. I've had a complex about it for the longest time."

A complex.

At Ruruka's words, a certain scene springs to mind.

At my first meeting with Fran and Sera. even though I healed her wounds when Ruruka begged me, she got angry and said "I didn't ask you". Up until now I thought that was due to her man-hating, but maybe that wasn't it. I see... the nuance wasn't that I did it on my own, but that Fran had no choice but to accept the treatment because Ruruka insisted on it. After all this time, it finally makes sense.

"But you healed all the wounds and scars on my entire body. You didn't even take more than the price of a single Heal... that was definitely High Heal, right? A single Heal wouldn't normally heal all traces of wounds on my entire body."

Ruruka's monologue continues. But that probably was just Heal. She's likely talking about the time when I had just come to this world, and I had no experience controlling mana. I simply screwed up my mana manipulation and accidentally fired off healing magic.

"Sorry Shiki, for telling you this in my last moments. It must be troublesome for you.

...Ahh, your face is getting dim."

That's the smokescreen.

It's not from the petrification. Ruruka has no wounds or scars anywhere. I guarantee it.

But I can't say it. Yeah, telling her now would be too cruel.

As I remain silent with my eyes transfixed on Ruruka's, a wind blows through the plaza. Gradually, the smoke clears.

Looks like the monster commotion is already wrapping up. The dragon fainted after its collar was destroyed, and the other monsters were exterminated by the reinforcements that rushed in. I'm guessing they're the participants from the martial arts tournament. Perhaps through the actions of Aria and the other knights as well, there are few casualties or seriously injured people. Looks like

that dragon whose collar was destroyed really was aiming for the saint.

"Eh... h-huh!?"

While I'm still confirming the state of our surroundings, Ruruka seems to notice the incongruity.

Ruruka's eyes turn to my face, then to her own body, then they stop. She freezes for a few seconds, then looks back at my face once again, then at her own body.

Has she realized everything now? Ruruka's face turns a deep crimson.

"Eh, w-why!? The petrifying breath should've hit me!?"

Ruruka loses her composure. Well, the number of people in this world who can use EX Heal is truly limited. In her wildest dreams, she wouldn't have expected that I could use it.

It should be obvious that somebody within the smokescreen did it, but thankfully there are many people gathered here. It shouldn't be possible to narrow it down to a particular person.

"You must've just barely avoided it?"

"Eh, but... h-huhhh?"

Ruruka tilts her neck and starts to brood. However, she stiffens with a jolt when our eyes meet.

...Then she seeks my reaction.

"A-About those things I said just now..."

"Yeah, about that... there's something I need to tell you."

I softly clear my throat and speak.

"My control over my healing magic was just poor. The fact that I used High Heal on you was purely an accident."

I need to clear things up for her right now. The fact that she bears such goodwill towards me is due to a misunderstanding.

When I say that, Ruruka mutters "...I see." and gently hangs her head.

...Ah, maybe I didn't have to tell her that. I was feeling a little conflicted so I suddenly blurted it out, but the more I think about it, maybe something like that doesn't matter. With this, Ruruka's good impression of me will come to nothing.

"Ah, no, what I meant by that..."

And, when I try to explain my previous statement,

"...But you know, I'm sure that when you noticed my scars, you healed them without a second thought. You like to sexually harass and you lie all the time, but... you're extremely kind."

Ruruka gazes into my eyes as she speaks.

"I really do love you, Shiki."

Then she says it again. Ruruka's face is red, but mine probably is too. W-What do I do? Maybe it's because all I've done so far is sexual harassment, but when I'm struck head-on with appreciation like this, on the contrary I don't know what I should do.

"I-I see. That's, what should I say to that, errr..."

Then, when I try to put it into words for Ruruka somehow,

—I feel something pulling tightly at my clothes.

At the sensation I feel on my back, my consciousness that was completely focused on Ruruka returns all at once.

It's Yuel. Without me noticing it, she was right behind me. I wonder how long she's been there?

...It's Yuel we're talking about. After she set off the smoke bomb, it wouldn't be strange for her to cling to my back in order to guard me.

Not to mention that further behind Yuel, Eris is there too.

"..."

When Eris' eyes meet mine, she reflexively turns away. I don't know what mental state she's in, but seeing me being confessed to by a girl can't possibly

lead to a rise in her goodwill towards me. This is bad.

"M-Master...?"

Pinching my clothes with an uneasy expression, Yuel stares right into my eyes. She must have heard the whole thing after all. This is really bad.

"Ah..."

Then Ruruka seems to notice the two of them as well. She pulls an overcoat out from her item box and drapes it over her body to hide it. Then she rises to her knees and extends her body—

and her lips lightly touch my cheek.



"!?"

"...S-See you again."

After that she whispers into my ear, and runs off without showing her face.

...She was probably embarrassed. I sure am.

But what do I do?

Timidly, I glance toward Yuel and Eris.

"..."

Eris is looking down and doesn't attempt to raise her face,

"A-Ahh, M-Master was, Mas... ter was..."

and Yuel is staring at me on the verge of tears.

S-She left me with an unbelievable mess! This is worse than anything that's happened in the past. I can't possibly think of getting out of this with mere words.

I look around our surroundings for something to cling to, some way to escape.

When I do, there's that saint 10 meters away. My eyes suddenly meet Philine's. And then she says something to me.

She's too far away, so her voice doesn't reach me. But, somehow or other, I can tell what she said.

My elevated temperature due to Ruruka quickly chills. Yuel's voice too goes in one ear and out the other.

I don't know how to lip-read or anything. I could be mistaken. But I get the feeling that her lips definitely moved in that way.

"Found you."

I'm certain that's what she said.

Chapter 50: Archbishop

I meet eyes with that black-haired saint, Philine, and she smiles sweetly. Even though she's smiling, her mouth movements just before definitely sent a chill up my spine. I didn't hear her voice, but I get the feeling she muttered "found you".

...W-What does that mean?

Without a doubt, it can't possibly be a development like "The cool black-haired man from that time. We didn't speak for long, but to think I would meet you again so soon in a place like this!". True, we did meet once before I entered the beauty contest plaza, but it wasn't an especially romantic conversation. As for what we talked about at that time, it was just that we had the same hair color and confirming that I'm a healer. It's not remotely possible.

Besides, saying "found you" means that that saint-sama was searching for me.

...Well, it's not like I don't have any idea why the saint of the church would be looking for someone, though. Most likely, it's the person who used that large-scale healing magic on the city at the time of the Krankheit Turtle incident. I mean, the city is referring to it as a miracle from god.

...The one who cast that large-scale healing magic on the city was me. In other words, I'm the one she was searching for.

And she found me.

H-How did she find me? Back when I treated Ruruka and the others with EX Heal, she shouldn't have been able to see me since Yuel set off that smoke bomb. And there were plenty of people within the smokescreen other than me. I wonder if she happened to have some sort of magic tool to circumvent the smokescreen?

...No, maybe that's not it?

That saint called out to me before the beauty contest. This is just a guess, but that saint might have already known that there was a powerful healer in this

city. And she talked to me before the beauty contest because I was already under investigation as one of the excellent healers in this city, or something.

Thinking about that situation, a smokescreen was set up and everyone under it was cured of their petrification. And within that smokescreen, only one of the excellent healers that she had marked was present. Looking at it from the saint's perspective, even if it's not definitive, there's a very high probability that she'd conclude it's me. That's likely what happened.

Yeah, recklessly firing off EX Heal was unwise after all, huh? Well, whether or not there was a smokescreen, I was going to heal Ruruka and the other contestants. As a man, there's no way I could have allowed those big-breasted beauties to die before my eyes. My healing magic ability would've been discovered either way.

...Besides, thinking about it any more isn't going to change the fact that I was found out.

What's essential right now is that the Saint-sama of the Church of Medine, this country's state religion, has been searching for me for some reason. Depending on her intentions, my actions from here on out will change. There are two main options: do I run away immediately, or do I give up and go quietly?

—And, as I'm considering the options.

"My goodness, Saint-sama. I had received word of a monster attack, but..."

A middle-aged man in priest robes approaches the saint and greets her. His physique is on the plump side. To put it less kindly, he's as chubby as an Orc. A procession of muscular guards in priest garb follows behind him. I dare say this guy holds a high position in the church as well.

"...Archbishop D'arnaud."

The priest, whom the saint addressed as Archbishop D'arnaud, glances at the collapsed temporary stage and the scattered monster corpses while he surveys the premises. After that, his attention fastens on the unconscious Earth Dragon. Then, eyeing the traces of petrification spread out along the ground, he speaks.

"...An Earth Dragon, hmm? The treatment of the petrified... looks to be

finished already. When I received word of the monster raid, I thought of lending my humble ability to aid with the treatment, but it seems there was no need. As expected of Saint-sama, naturally."

"Nay, you flatter me. Were the knights and guards not present, who knows what might have come to pass."

Saying he'd help with the petrification treatment, I wonder if that means that this Archbishop D'arnaud or whatever priest can use EX Heal too? Well, I did hear from Eris that archbishop is the top position in the church for this city. It wouldn't be strange if he could use it. That would make him the second person I know of who can use EX Heal.

...But that's not what I want to know.

What I want to know is that saint's goal.

...While the saint is talking to that archbishop, I wanna gather intelligence related to the reason she was searching for me. But being 10 meters away from the saint and the archbishop with their multitude of guards, I may already be a carp on a cutting board.

"Though I must say, I'm astonished that there would be a raid aimed at Saint-sama in this labyrinth city. I had heard that the evil god's adherents were operating out of the royal capital. Good gracious, more than anything, it is truly well that you are unharmed."

"I was quite taken aback when the Earth Dragon appeared, but thanks to it quickly being rendered unconscious, the damage was blessedly kept to a minimum. If it had released even one more breath, even my mana capacity might not have held out."

The archbishop and the saint continue their discussion. I wonder what those evil god adherents are? I feel like the saint was saying something about them too during the raid. Oh yeah, in the Bible that Eris was reading, wasn't it written that the evil god threatened humanity in the past? I guess there are religious conflicts in this world too.

...Wait a minute, that saint said earlier that her mana was empty, but now she's talking like she still has some left over. Don't tell me that statement about

being out of mana was a lie to fish me out? I kinda thought this when she was using shills to gather faith too, but this bitch is a schemer. And she's had that same smile painted on her face this entire time as she continues to speak with the archbishop.

"I see, I see... although, Saint-sama must be tired as well. By all means, please make use of my church to rest yourself."

"...Archbishop D'arnaud, I am thankful for your kind words, but I must speak to Meirhartz-sama immediately concerning this latest raid. And the matter of the continued donations from the other day is as yet unfinished, so I believe I will be indisposed for some time at Lord Meirhartz's mansion."

"...Is that so? Well then, there's no helping it."

Meirhartz was Fran's family name, if I'm not mistaken. In other words, that means the saint is going to talk to Fran's father, the lord.

...I wonder if the knight brigade will have to bear some responsibility for this latest raid? Well, an incident did occur right in the middle of the city. Moreover, it was aimed at the saint, an important person who holds a title within the state religion of this country. Normally, the knights would take the blame as the ones in charge of protecting the city. And each city's knight brigade is unified under the command of that region's lord.

The knights' responsibility is the lord's responsibility. He might end up being questioned. I hope that middle-aged lord doesn't collapse from anxiety.

"Now then, please excuse me. Until we meet again, Archbishop D'arnaud."

And, their dialogue comes to a close.

The saint turns around, and increasingly comes closer to me. Her "found you" words immediately after the smokescreen cleared, and the movement of her lips at that time spring back into my mind

What the heck is going to happen to me from now on? What is the saint's goal? I have no idea. Somehow, the bits and pieces are giving me a bad feeling about this. My legs were itching to escape earlier, but the more I calm down, the more I get the feeling that running is pointless.

The saint of the state religion. I don't know how much authority she has, but at least it seems like she has enough to arrest me if I try to run. Even if I manage to slip away into the crowd immediately, if she felt like it, it would only be a matter of time before I'm captured.

I wonder if I'll be confined in order to make use of my healing magic? But it might still be fine if the Church of Medine welcomes me with open arms as the savior of the city.

I'm saying so myself, but I have a high utility value.

I only realized it from that incident with the Krankheit Turtle earlier, but I have enough mana to envelop the entire city in healing magic. Which is to say, no matter what kind of sickness or disease sweeps through town, I can do something about it all by myself.

Those in positions of power would be desperate to get their hands on me. Furthermore, if said power is with the great church which has deep ties to healing magic, I ought to be a potential recruit that they wish to secure by any means necessary. If I'm only taken into their custody then it's still okay, but I wouldn't be surprised if they took advantage of their influence to forcibly inscribe me with a slave crest or something in order to further restrain me.

I haven't even put my hands on Eris yet. It was even finally going well with Ruruka. I still have things I need to do.

But I can't possibly fight before the mighty authority of the state religion. And running would be inane too. I'd just be in a worse position after I'm caught.

...In other words, what I need to do now is negotiate.

It will become a battle against this saint to establish my rights as best I can.

Even now, the saint approaches. She's not giving me any more time. I gather my resolve and prepare to speak to the saint, when—

—she passes right by me, without a single glance in my direction.

The saint and her guards pass directly by my side and exit the plaza. There's no sign of her coming back or even looking behind her. Most likely, they're heading to the lord's manor.

...H-Huh?

A magnificent snubbing, as if she wasn't even conscious of my existence. We even talked a little, she could have at least thrown me a brief glance if she was gonna walk so close by me. I mean, I'd rather nothing happen if at all possible, but for nothing to happen after coming this far makes me feel uncomfortable in its own way.

Don't tell me that "found you" was my misunderstanding? ...N-No, but, I definitely saw it. And our eyes met, plus she was looking over here for a long time after that, not to mention that smile ever since. She must've had some sort of reason.

As I'm pondering, I suddenly meet eyes with that D'arnaud or whatever archbishop.

...Ah, maybe he's the reason? When I think about it carefully, the saint is still young. She has talent with healing magic, but she might not be able to decide the important matters.

That archbishop's serious expression. Those sharp eyes, that seem to see through everything. His appearance makes me feel like no matter what kind of lies I tell, they'll be exposed.

Taking over for the saint, that middle-aged archbishop is going to discuss what's going to happen to me from now on. I wonder if that's what it means.

...No, that's not it either.

The archbishop's focus is a bit off. Now that I look closer, he's not watching me.

The archbishop is looking behind me, at Eris. At her sensual body, covered by that habit.



I see, so what he's seeing through are Eris' clothes, huh? That sharp glint in

his eye must be him squinting to try and perceive Eris a little more vividly. His serious expression too, that must be him trying to imagine what's underneath Eris' clothes with all his willpower.

Well, it's not like I don't understand that feeling. And Eris is a beauty. I'm probably looking at Eris in that exact same way every day.

But since he's concentrating on licking Eris all over with his eyes, he's not paying attention to me. The archbishop and his escort priests don't show any sign of coming to talk to me either. Besides, now that I think it over, neither the saint nor the archbishop have said a single word about me.

Was it really my misunderstanding? But I could have sworn...

No, in reality, the people of the church aren't aware of me. Even though it really looked that way, it only *looked* that way.

It must have been my mistake.

...

Guess I should go home. It's not like the beauty contest can resume anymore. And when I'm about to head back, I realize once again.

I was preoccupied with the saint so it unintentionally slipped my mind, but all that stuff happened with Ruruka. What's more, Yuel and Eris were watching it.

Now that I get a good look, while Aria is clearing away monster corpses in the distance, she's staring daggers in my direction. It doesn't look like she can abandon her duty to come over here, but she's totally focused on me. I guess Aria was watching at that moment, too.

I forgot. There's still this awful mess.

I lower my gaze, and Yuel is right beside me, silently looking down.

...Oh yeah, I get the feeling she's been tightly clenching my clothes this whole time. The situation being what it was, I unintentionally ignored her, though.

She seems depressed. First things first, how am I going to soothe her feelings?

Volume 3 LN Side Story: The Redheaded Adventurer

It's been a week since I came to this world.

How did I end up in this world? I don't know the reason.

However, even if I don't know the reason, I'll starve without something to eat.

If I give in to drowsiness outdoors, I'm liable to freeze to death in this cold, winter climate.

In order to go on living, in order to buy food, in order to secure lodging, I need to earn money.

It's like an unavoidable curse for those who possess living flesh.

That's why I decided to beg and plead with Eris, the big-breasted beauty whom I ran into on the streets, to let me work at this hospital.

"I suppose it's about time for lunch. It will take me a little time to prepare, so please take care of things for a while."

"Yeah, got it."

During this week, I've learned various things from Eris, like where we are, what magic is, and so on.

A world where magic exists. A world of diverse races.

It's completely different from the Japan I was living in up until now.

Of course, I've had my worries... but well, when I gaze at Eris' giant knockers, none of that seems to matter anymore.

I'm not the type to dwell on things I can't change. And for a little while, it seems like I'll be able to get by somehow thanks to Eris' kindness.

Besides, my healing magic ability was apparently amazing enough to shock her.

By helping out here, I should at least be able to keep my stomach full.

...Well, it's not like there aren't any problems, though.

Has Eris never lived together with a man before? She's overly defenseless. Like yesterday, she was casually drying her underwear in the room.

How long will my reason last against this defenseless Eris and her massive melons?

I don't have a shred of self-confidence as far as that's concerned.

"...A-A customer?"

I'm mulling that over, when the door to the hospital suddenly opens.

And in walks a girl.

She has red hair that just about reaches down to her shoulders.

She's wearing a cloak long enough to cover her entire body from the shoulders down, securely fastened in front.

It makes her look like a teru teru bōzu.

She sits down in the chair in front of me,

"Um, one Heal, please."

and says that. Then, she gingerly sticks her right arm out from under the cloak.

On it, there's some purplish-red discoloration of the skin; perhaps from internal bleeding?

...It seems to be a bruise.

No, there may even be some bone fractures. That looks painful.

But well, if it's just on the level of bone fractures, a single Heal will do the trick.

Since I started working at this hospital, I've gotten used to healing magic.

I could heal something on this level with my eyes closed.

"Well then, Heal."

Then, I invoke healing magic.

When I do—

the girl in front of me glows brightly enough to dazzle my eyes.

"Ahh..."

"Eh!? W-What's this!?"

Oh crap. I was careless.

When Heal is invoked, usually it should emit a faint, green glow.

But the one just now was clearly different.

No matter how you look at it, that wasn't normal.

With brightness like that, it's as if I cast EX Heal on her entire body.

Even though I only cast Heal on her arm.

"E-Ehhh...? That light, that wasn't Heal!?"

Redhead-chan seems confused, but I know the cause.

I messed up my mana manipulation.

The day before yesterday too, the same sort of thing happened with a different customer.

Afterwards, as a result of verifying my healing magic with Eris, we established the fact that my mana capacity is out of the ordinary.

Having an enormous mana capacity is a strength for a healer, but in a certain respect it's also a weakness. That being the precision of my mana manipulation.

Manipulating this enormous amount of mana precisely is like trying to pour juice from a steel barrel into a tiny cup.

If my attention wavers even a little, my mana will easily overflow and go out of control.

"A-All better?"

It's not like there's any particular problem if I screw up with a customer, but this one shined unusually bright in comparison.

By some chance, there's a possibility that the healing magic didn't go off correctly.

I need to confirm.

Redhead-chan looks at her own arm, at which point she seems to realize something and peeks beneath her cloak.

"I-I'm healed... eh, no way, even the scars? ...Everything, everything is healed!?"

So she's healed. Apparently it worked fine.

"I see, that's great. Well then, one Heal comes to 200 Zeni."

"Y-You only want 200 Zeni!?"

Redhead-chan's eyes widen as she speaks.

This is something I heard from other customers, but this hospital is apparently cheap compared to other places.

Occasionally, customers who came without knowing that are surprised.

"Yeah, since it's an ordinary Heal, that costs 200 Zeni here."

"B-But..."

Redhead-chan is bewildered.

She might even be feeling guilty over receiving healing for cheaper than market price.

Although she's showing me an apologetic face, she looks at her bank card and seems to be hesitating.

She probably doesn't have much money.

If it bothers her that much then I'd like for her to show me her gratitude with her body... a part of me thought that, but in the end, her teru teru bōzu appearance with zero exposure or sex appeal isn't doing it for me.

She should at least take off her cloak since we're indoors.

"Well, don't worry about it."

And the one who set the price wasn't me, it was Eris.

"...T-Thank you."

Redhead-chan expresses her thanks. Before I forget, I receive the 200 Zeni with my bank card.

Man, is it just my imagination or is she kinda staring at me?

Then Redhead-chan acts a little perplexed and asks me a question.

"Umm, about that healing magic just now..."

...I wonder if she's suspicious after all, since that wasn't the glow of a Heal.

And nearly all the healers of this world study at this religious group known as the Church of Medine or whatever to learn healing magic, so in that respect I'm something of an unlicensed practitioner.

I also get the feeling that it'd be bad if anyone grills me too deeply about my healing magic.

—Then, at that moment.

Something even worse happens.

It's Eris.

Eris comes over from the inner hospital, face twitching.

"H-Hey, Shiki. One pair of my underwear is missing; y-you wouldn't happen to know anything about that, would you...?"

"W-Well then, miss customer, that will be all! ...Eris, of course it wasn't me. But missing underwear, how terrible! Let's search for it together!"

It wasn't me.

Okay, it was me, but I haven't used it for obscene purposes.

It's just that there was underwear within my reach, so I unconsciously grabbed a pair and ended up stashing it under my bed, that's all.

I'm interested in girls' bodies, but I'm not some pervert who gets off from a mere pair of underwear.

That's why it wasn't me.

"W-Wait a minute! I... I mean, t-that healing magic just now... that must've been...!"

The redheaded girl is calling out to me, but I don't have time for that right now.

I honestly didn't have any special reason for it, it was merely a passing fancy.

You could call it a reflex, or an impulse.

Even now, I don't know why I did such a thing.

I simply acted on instinct and ended up hiding it before I realized what I was doing.

If I had to name a reason, it was because it was right there in front of me.

That's all.

"I-It really wasn't you...?"

"Of course not, Eris! I don't have a clue what happened to your white panties!"

But man, this situation is extremely awkward.

I have to get to Eris' underwear right away and pretend I found it by chance!

A few days later.

Although Eris was suspicious, I succeeded in maintaining a natural appearance to a certain degree while returning her underwear, and safely finished my work today at the hospital.

...Thank goodness I didn't actually get kicked out.

Moreover, Eris started drying her underwear in her own room, so that's one less thing I have to struggle to exercise reason over.

I do kinda get the feeling that she knows I stole it, but I'm probably still okay.

As I'm contemplating, another visitor comes to the hospital.

"H-Hello."

It's the Redhead-chan from earlier.

But her atmosphere is different from before.

Thinking about what's different, it's her clothing.

She's not wearing the cloak that was covering her entire body like a teru teru bōzu.

Today it's just shorts and a shirt.

Did she remove the cloak upon entering the hospital? She's dressed in clothes with a combination of a girly feeling and plenty of exposure for ease of movement.

Somehow there's a bit of a boyish atmosphere to this outfit.

And there's a shield on her arm and a sword attached to her belt. Looks like she was an adventurer.

"Err, can I please get a Heal?"

Redhead-chan sits on the chair in front of me today as well, asking for treatment.

No, there are other redheaded customers, so let's call her Boyish-chan from now on.

I don't know her name, either.

On Boyish-chan's arm, there's a wound that appears to be a slash from a monster.

The bleeding seems to have stopped, but it still looks painful.

From what Eris told me, adventuring in this city is a job where you fight monsters for a living.

Injuries like this are probably an everyday occurrence.

"Sure, Heal it is."

This time, I pay careful attention when manipulating my mana and cast Heal.

Once I do, Heal safely invokes and Boyish-chan's arm is covered in a faint green glow.

"Alright, success. The price will be 200 Zeni."

This time was a success.

As you'd expect, I can't afford to screw up twice with the same customer.

I was able to cast a genuine, normal Heal.

With this, I shouldn't be questioned about my healing magic.

"I knew it, even the scars are healed..."

However, Boyish-chan looks at the arm I cast healing magic on and mutters that.

...Scars.

Now that she mentions it, I'm pretty sure Eris said something like for treating scars it's fine to charge a separate fee or refuse.

Because healing scars is difficult or whatever.

For me, though, it's so simple that I don't really understand what's hard about it.

But Eris is probably right when it comes to the common sense of society.

...I wonder if I messed up? No, compared to the bright flash last time, this time should've still been normal.

I'm just a little skilled at healing scars.

That shouldn't be enough to make her harbor doubts.

Rather, it'd actually be harder for me to intentionally avoid healing the scars.

And Boyish-chan doesn't seem to intend to pry too deeply; she takes out her bank card from her pocket without asking any questions in particular.

Then she places her bank card over mine.

However...

"Oi oi, the money's not coming out. Maybe you don't have enough of a balance left?"

"Eh, h-huh!?"

I check, and the money hasn't passed over into my bank card.

Boyish-chan seems to have noticed as well; her face pales as she stares at her bank card.

"...C-Come to think of it, I was so happy that my scars were healed that I ended up buying clothes too... t-there was also the cost of the inn! ...Ah, plus I got the shield repaired, so..."

Apparently she has some idea; Boyish-chan holds her head in her hands.

"...You don't have any money?"

"Ah, that's, err...ahaha."

Scratching her cheek, Boyish-chan laughs and averts her eyes.

Looks like she doesn't.

Now that I think about it, I didn't notice when she was covered up with a cloak like a teru teru bōzu, but this Boyish-chan has a pretty nice body.

Her breasts aren't quite as big as Eris', but she's rather buxom.

I wonder if I couldn't have her pay me with her body?

No way, right? That would be impossible, right?

As I'm ogling Boyish-chan's breasts in that manner.

"Ah..."

Boyish-chan quickly covers her chest with her hands.

I guess I was staring too intensely.

While it's true that she's dressed a bit lightly, as expected, I didn't have any delicacy, huh.

Perhaps she'll be on guard and stop coming here anymore.

However, Boyish-chan looks at her bank card, then at my face, and finally down at her own breasts, then starts fidgeting for some reason.

And, gazing at me with upturned eyes, she speaks.

"U-Um, there's something I wanted to ask you about when you healed me before... um, that treatment, was it actually..."

About before?

I wonder what the heck she's talking about, but if she's bringing it up with this

timing it can only mean *that*.

...This Boyish-chan is currently worried about not having enough money for treatment.

If this goes poorly, I could end up handing her over to the authorities.

And as for topics that could come up in that situation...

"Say no more. I can waive the fee this time. Just don't say a thing and go home."

there's the matter of me stealing Eris' underwear.

She's using that as a threat.

I can't think of anything other than that.

It's possible that this Boyish-chan was listening to my conversation with Eris earlier.

If I don't want her to spread rumors that there's a pervy healer at this hospital who steals his roommate's underwear, then waive the fee.

I'm sure that's how this is gonna go.

"Got it? I'll heal you whenever you get injured. So please, please don't mention it."

My honor, or a paltry 200 Zeni per time fee.

It's obvious which one I'll choose.

And besides, I don't really mind yielding to a threat from a cute girl.

But Boyish-chan's reaction is kinda strange.

After I say I don't need the fee, her face turns solid red, and she stares straight into my eyes.

I wonder if waiving the fee wasn't enough and now she's mad?

No, going any further than this would be extortion.

Maybe I should resign myself to being labeled a pervert and hand her over to the authorities already.

...However, it looks like my thought process was way off the mark.

"...My breasts... you wanna see them?"

Mumbling that with a red face, Boyish-chan places her fingers on her chest buttons.

"I don't have enough right now to pay the treatment fee, but... maybe you can excuse it today with this?"

Then she starts to undo her buttons.

"O-Oi, wait a..."

As she unfastens her buttons, beautiful, white skin peeks through.

Her black undergarment pushes up the soft mounds of flesh beneath it, asserting their existence.

And when our eyes meet, she shyly turns her head away.

What the?

What kind of development is this?

Does that mean she wasn't threatening me?

So many questions are coming to mind, but looking at the tits in front of my eyes, I stop caring either way.

"D-Don't you think my skin is pretty?"

"Y-Yeah."

Despite being an adventurer, there isn't a single scar on her beautiful skin.

I don't really understand, but right now she's apparently showing me her breasts in exchange for the treatment fee.

I'm full of questions, but just knowing that is enough.

It looks so soft. I end up reaching out unconsciously with my hand.

"I-It's too soon for that!"

But Boyish-chan pulls her body away from my hand and quickly refastens her buttons.

"...W-Well, thanks for the treatment."

Then, with that single line of thanks, she races out of the hospital.

...Just when I thought I was being threatened, she showed me her tits.

Not to mention how she bashfully left like she was running away.

What the hell is going on?

I'm concerned about it, but no amount of thinking is going to help me understand.

About all I know is that the girl didn't pay the treatment fee, and her underwear was black.

It's no use thinking.

I decide to devote all of the resources in my brain to etching those huge tits she showed me onto my memory in vivid detail.

Since then, that Boyish-chan has been coming to the hospital often.

Perhaps since she's an adventurer, as I figured, she seems to get injured frequently.

I don't know whether she doesn't have much money or she's just stingy, but she's mastered the art of price reduction negotiations to slash the treatment fee by paying with her body instead.

Nevertheless, whenever I do a price reduction negotiation with that Boyish-chan, it's witnessed by Eris nearly every time.

To the point where I wonder if she isn't aiming for that.

...And lately, I kinda feel like Eris' anger has been getting scarier.

But Boyish-chan's discounts have been steadily escalating.

At first it was just looking, but then she started letting me touch.

Then me touching her became her pressing herself against me.

Every time Eris gets mad I decide to stop the discounts next time, but I always end up giving in to the escalated negotiation methods.

...At this rate, I get the feeling that sooner or later Eris really will throw me

out.

I have to become a diligent employee before much longer.

Alright, that settles it.

I won't accept the next price discount negotiation.

I absolutely won't lose to Boyish-chan's seduction.

Taking that determination to heart, I start my work at the hospital again today.